

## Orbiters

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## Orbiters

by [Zombieheroine](#)

### Summary

The great civil war ended for good with Optimus Prime becoming one with the Allspark and Megatron leaving everything for the cold of space. But one can't escape their own thoughts and regrets by running, and eventually Megatron makes a decision to return and demand closure from Primus.

No matter the time that has passed, no matter that Cybertron has moved on to a new era, the conflict between Optimus Prime and Megatron is still without a solution. It leads them to wander to the sacred depths of their planet and to unknown dimensions, and after travels like that even gods tend to pay attention. Maybe, just maybe, Primus might let the stars cross again, but first there are lessons to learn and truths to face.

### Notes

I was so sad after Predacons Rising and a bit bummed after the season finale of RiD-2015, and the latter spawned a new idea that I combined with some old ones plus my favorite tropes, trippy visions, and my great need for fixing canon.  
I'll add more tags when I update and they become relevant, so heads up.

And now, dear reader, I hope you're in for a ride of mythical space stuff and epic true love that has a price tag on it.



# You'll love me at once

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For the longest time Megatron simply flew. He took a course off Cybertron, into space and settled on it, not stopping once. The rust of Unicron withered and peeled away from his plating, leaving behind a scratched and rough version of his old form with acid burns and no shine, raw metal in desperate need of proper sanding and polishing.

He couldn't care less though, the only thing he was capable of thinking was how he couldn't stop.

Returning from the dead had not felt good.

Megatron couldn't remember his own creation but he certainly recalled being yanked from the blissful nothingness into Unicron's thrall. He had felt oppression before but never before had his own frame betrayed him like that, and even though he had seen everything that had happened and what he had done through his own optics, it hadn't felt real. He had existed only as a spark, nothing more, and the feeling had been endlessly more terrifying than anything he had ever felt before.

Being face to face with a god while having no physical being to call his own was the most helpless Megatron had ever been in his life.

In the vacuum of space he was alone in silence and even though he hated to admit it to himself, it was comforting. He hadn't ever considered himself a bot who needed comfort from anything or anyone, but while learning to command his aching frame again he didn't have anyone but himself to lie to, and he wasn't in the habit of doing that.

Megatron might not recall his creation, but he certainly recalled his termination.

He wasn't sure who it had been who pierced his chassis but he was certain he had heard that voice somewhere before. The pain had been nothing new, but the eerie coldness spreading through him as his internal systems shut down had been. His frame had died around him as his spark had struggled to survive, he hadn't heard anything or registered anyone around him, only the pure light of the Star Saber jutting out of his chassis and the feeling of Optimus staring at him.

Even now the spot that had been pierced by the Star Saber throbbed with faint ghost pain.

Optimus had been the last thing he saw, and the last bot he had looked at before he had transformed and left Cybertron as well. Above in the sky he had turned back to watch the Prime disappear into the Well of the Allspark and be no more. The last string tying him to Cybertron and this life was severed, and so Megatron flew.

Thinking about Optimus had a tendency to push him into directions he hadn't considered before, and even though it took eons before Megatron finally stopped, he didn't bother to check his chronometer but simply turned around.

He still existed, and he didn't believe in suicide as a means to any end, at least not before all other options had been exhausted. There was one last thing for him to do, and so he navigated a course back to Cybertron. It was after all the one place he could try out this one thing. His fuel levels were low and he wasn't certain if he'd make it, but even that felt like a trivial little detail now.

Cybertron was recovering. The people were bringing their dreams into reality which was easy since the entire planet was little more than a blank canvas waiting for new generations painting and

building and molding it according to their vision. Megatron barely recognized the place when he arrived, but the Sea of Rust was still the same old seemingly endless plain and the Well was in the middle of it.

When Megatron stood on the edge of the most sacred place of all Cybertron and gazed into the depths of it he had to wonder if he remembered his birth after all. He wondered if he would have to actually offline to recall it, to unite with the Allspark again to fully understand the state of bright nothingness.

The thought was intriguing, but Megatron didn't have time to ponder the miracles of life – something precious and what belonged to him was somewhere down there, and the only way to get it back was to go and ask. He took a leap and fell.

There was the Well and an endless fall into the dark, and then without a warning light that swallowed him entirely. His optics became useless and he offlined them but couldn't block the light out no matter how hard he tried. The light was almost like a living creature that transcended all physical planes, pierced his spark and the abstract being that was his mind, and registered on all of his sensors regardless of their type, but despite all this it didn't feel invasive.

Megatron wondered if Optimus had felt this embrace, and the scar left by the Star Saber throbbed again.

The laws of gravity didn't seem to apply in the core, as Megatron noticed when his fall came to a halt, but instead of a violent crash his pedes met the cool ground softly like he was gently settled down on it. The light grew less intense and crawled out of his spark and mind, and finally Megatron could online his optics again.

The visual feed focused and adjusted and he was able to look around. Whatever the place he was standing in was, it looked nothing like he had imagined, and definitely not like any bottom of a well.

He was standing in the middle of an impossibly wide pure white space that was not a room but more like a mighty hall, vast like an ocean and high like the sky. Beneath his pedes was a smooth, cool floor made of stone he hadn't ever seen in his life, its surface clear like glass but the depths like a frozen mass of thick white clouds. The roof was arched and high, and the entirety of it was painted full of constellations and nebulae that swirled and shone like the real thing, and for a moment Megatron felt a wave of terror wash over him like he could fall into the endless space stretching above him.

The hall itself was empty aside from the stark pillars that supported the arches of void above.

Megatron slowly turned around a full circle, looking for a wall, a presence or any clue of which way he should start walking to. He saw none, so he picked the direction he had faced when he had landed and started to walk.

Time was still meaningless to him so he didn't consult his chronometer, but it felt like he walked for cycles in perfect silence. His pedes made a bizarre shuffling sound on each step, nothing like a stone should have sounded like, and he wondered if he was even alive anymore or wandering around in emptiness as a divine punishment for all the evil he had done.

His thoughts began to wander and before long landed on Optimus again. Maybe every spark made this journey to Primus as they died. He imagined how Optimus would have taken to these surroundings. The librarian would have probably been curious and wanted to inspect all the pillars individually, lay down on the floor and listen to it, then turn on his back to gaze into the ceiling,

careless and smiling now that everything was over...

Megatron almost hit a wall. He had been so deep in his thoughts that he had failed to see he had reached the wall of the hall. It wasn't like the floor, but bore a resemblance to something like white gneiss. Megatron laid a servo on it and suddenly suspected it hadn't been there a klik ago.

"Good day," greeted a calm voice somewhere above him.

Megatron jumped and looked around him, and just a few meters to his right he saw a tall ladder and on top of them was a small lightly built bot sitting and painting on the wall.

Megatron blinked and was much too confused to say anything. The small bot didn't seem bothered by this, just dipped the brush in their servo into a small bucket of paint hanging from a hook on the ladder and kept painting.

"Aren't you going to greet me back?" they asked after a moment of silence.

"I... Apologies," Megatron said. He took a step back to look at what the bot was painting on the wall and saw a long line of letters he couldn't read. "Good day. Who are you?"

"I am Primus," the bot casually answered.

Megatron took another look at the bot as their words sank into his consciousness. The bot was small and light, bland and unremarkable in every way. They had hardly any armor plating, just modest, thin plates of white and silver and glass making up a physical manifestation that wasn't anything compared to what Megatron had seen of Unicron on Earth.

"You are Primus? How do I know that?" Megatron challenged the painter, who chuckled gently.

"You came here to see me, didn't you? Who else could I be?" the painter asked, and Megatron had to admit they had a point.

"Do you know why I came?" he asked.

Primus painted an entire letter with utmost care before answering. "I know all my creations, Megatron. But I don't get the chance to talk with you directly very often, so why won't you tell me yourself?"

Megatron clenched his servos into fists. "I came here to demand you return Optimus Prime to me!"

Primus hummed, maybe thoughtfully, maybe pitying him. "Oh, you two. Optimus is not here."

Megatron frowned. "What are you talking about? Of course he's here, he died! I still need him, so give him back to me!"

Primus sighed and put the brush into the paint bucket, then turned their jet-black faceplate to Megatron and smiled. Their optics were bright like the nebulae above them and the lines of their faceplate shimmered with the same light. "Megatron, you are being very rude."

Megatron felt an unfamiliar brush of shame in his spark but still struggled to look the God in their optics. "Then why did you let me see you if you think that? You must have known why I came here!"

Primus sighed. "But I didn't know, Megatron. Well, I suppose I guessed, but I didn't know because you yourself don't know."

Megatron frowned again, now with honest confusion. “What do you mean? Of course *I* know!”

Primus smiled at him and tilted their helm to the side. “You think you do, but you don't. You are asking me to call a bot back from the dead just for you. That is no small request.”

“I know that!” Megatron said impatiently. “But I need him! We're not done yet!”

“But he was done,” Primus reminded him.

“I don't care!” Megatron snapped.

Primus sighed again, deeper this time and regarded Megatron for a long while. It was impossible to say what they were thinking or what would happen next, if anything, and before the silence passed Megatron had to avert his gaze from their faceplate.

“I know how much you want to see him again,” Primus said slowly. They sounded very thoughtful, but Megatron couldn't tell what they were thinking about, though he wished the painter was at least considering his demand.

“Do you even know who you want back?” Primus asked.

Megatron raised his gaze, puzzled. “Optimus Prime, like I said. He used to be called Orion Pax, lived in Iacon, worked in the Grand Archives -”

Primus lifted a servo to stop the flood of trivial information. “I know whom we are talking about. The question was do *you* know?”

Megatron stared at the small God, trying to grasp the meaning of their words and failing. “What do you mean?”

Primus smiled, then got up and started to climb down the latter. “I'll show you.”

Megatron was just about to open his intake and ask what they meant by that, but suddenly he wasn't in the hall anymore. An explosion of noise knocked his audio receptors offline for a klik and Megatron looked around. He recognized the place as Kaon, and he was standing in the middle of the wide road leading straight to the town's square. He looked there and saw a mighty black fortress rising where there had used to be a memorial in Solus Prime's honor.

The streets were full of people, all clearly celebrating. Bots blocked all other streets but the main one, all windows and balconies of the buildings were occupied and some had even climbed on lampposts and on each other's shoulders. They were all cheering and chanting: “All hail Megatron! All hail Megatron!”

Megatron blinked at the scene before him and didn't know what to do.

“Shall we march then, my Lord?” asked a familiar slick voice by his side, and when Megatron turned he saw Starscream standing there, smirking.

“We go when I say so,” Megatron answered, and to his great surprise Starscream's smirk didn't even falter, he simply bowed and stepped back to his position where two of his fellow seekers welcomed him between them. Megatron caught a glimpse of Soundwave, Skyquake and Dreadwing, Shockwave, Knockout and Breakdown right behind him and again many more familiar faces behind them.

This was a victory march, then. It was actually very obvious once Starscream had said it; what else

could this be?

Megatron was standing at the beginning of a cleared road with his trusted officers right behind him, his people were chanting his name and his great fortress waited for him. He took the first step and the noise in the crowd only increased.

A small and insignificant silver and white insecticon prototype flew to his side, its glass wings making a buzzing sound in the air as it fit its flight speed to Megatron steps.

“This is the day the Decepticons won the long civil war,” the bug said, staring with its black optics at Megatron. “The war is over, you are the all powerful ruler of Cybertron and that building there is your great fortress and home from this day onwards. Autobots have either been captured or terminated, but one very special one is there, waiting for you.”

Megatron's spark jumped and shot a burst of wild charge through his systems like it was preparing him for either fight or be killed. They were approaching the black fortress faster than he thought they should have been able to, and his intake went dry. One thought pierced through his confusion, joy and fright: This couldn't be real.

“This isn't real,” he mumbled aloud.

The insecticon by his side buzzed. “This is very real, Megatron. I want to show this to you.”

“And then what?”

“We'll see.”

The celebrations went on even after Megatron had greeted his loyal Decepticons before his fortress and stepped inside. None of his officers followed, not even Soundwave or Starscream, who joined the parade flight along with his trine and loyal seekers. Megatron was left alone in the entrance hall of the fortress with the modest form of Primus.

“Where is he?” Megatron asked restlessly.

Primus pointed an antennae towards the elevator doors at the back wall. “He is waiting for you in your personal quarters on the top of the fortress.”

Megatron felt numb all over when he walked to the elevator. The insecticon landed and skittered to the elevator with him, and they traveled up in silence. This was just like Megatron's favorite dream of all time, only all of it showed to him like a reality: They had won, Cybertron was in his servos and he could mold it anyway he saw fit, and now this elevator was taking him to the only bot he could ever imagine ruling it by his side as his equal.

Optimus was waiting for him. His spark wouldn't stop spinning with excitement. Even if this was the one last dream he had before he offlined permanently it was all worth it.

The elevator came to a halt and the doors slid open. A short and narrow corridor lead to a door that Megatron would have to dare open.

Primus rose to their wings again and flew up to the ceiling where they stayed upside down.

“I will wait here. Now go on. Go and see how much you know.”

Megatron couldn't think of anything to say, so he simply nodded and walked to the door. He couldn't remember ever being this nervous. He opened the door.

His personal quarters were a one open, simplistic room, a row of big windows opening to the city, a berth for two on one side, datapads, decorative weapons and a large computer module around a desk on another, and in the middle of the room was Optimus, on his knees and waiting for him.

The Prime was on his knees solely because a short chain attached his cuffed servos to the floor, and that very same chain bound his knees and ankles together, wrapped around his neck and hooked the noose to his wrists, effectively limiting his movements. Optimus had clearly fought recently; it showed in how his blue and red paint was either burned to a crisp or peeled off due to heavy blows that had dented his plating. His frame was full of scratches, dents and tears that were still leaking energon, and a few shattered blades still jutted out of his back.

Megatron had taken only one step inside when he stilled to stare at the Prime, and the door slid shut behind him, slamming and trapping him in with the dream.

Optimus raised his helm when he heard him enter, and Megatron looked at his bare face where the battlemask had been torn off and met the scouring stare of the blue optics in the bloodied face.

“Megatron,” Optimus grunted, his voice garbled and a small trail of energon leaking from the side of his intake. The look on his face was pure unmasked hatred. He yanked at his chains. “Is this what you think of me?! This is what you do to your enemies?! Don't you have *anything* decent left in you anymore?!”

Megatron didn't have words for the situation. This wasn't the dream he had had, he wouldn't do this. He knew he wouldn't treat Optimus like this, not like *this*.

“Answer me, Megatron!” Optimus yelled as loud as his damaged vocalizer could manage. “Is this what I am to do?! All this time... I wasn't anything but a simple hunting trophy to you?!”

Megatron looked away like he had been slapped. His servo reached for the door behind him, but he couldn't open it. He had to look at the mech before him, to look and see what had become of him.

“It isn't like that,” he tried to explain. His voice didn't betray him even though he couldn't find his usual confidence to back it up. “It isn't like that! You are... I wanted...”

Something seemed to dawn to Optimus and momentarily the hatred in his optics stepped aside to give way to pure shock. Optimus couldn't find words but shuffled on his place in a futile attempt to escape his chains. “No... No, that can't -”

His shock started to turn back into hatred, and now it had the wild edge of a terrified cornered beast.

“You are sick,” Optimus snarled, pressing his knees together. “Don't come any closer! Don't you dare touch me!”

“No, you don't understand -” Megatron started but stopped. How could he explain to the dream-Optimus that this was just a dream and something had gone wrong? Besides, this was still *his* dream, so how would explaining make it any better?

“You disgust me,” Optimus hissed and spat at Megatron's pedes.

“NO!” Megatron yelled. Optimus flinched and that only made it worse. “This isn't right! LET ME OUT THIS INSTANT!”

The little insecticon flew into the room and next to Megatron. “Do you want to reset the scene?”

“Yes! Yes, let me out of here! This isn't my dream!” Megatron shouted, wanting to shake the little



bug but not daring to lay a servo on Primus.

“This is the *reality* of your dream,” Primus explained, their voice strangely soothing. “Let's try again, shall we?”

“Yes...Please...,” Megatron breathed. He felt helpless again.

The crowd was celebrating and chanting Megatron's name. Megatron reset and adjusted his optics for a few times as he took in his surroundings that had changed with little forewarning. He was back on the road through Kaon, staring at the black fortress just a marching distance away.

“Shall we march, my Lord?” Starscream's voice asked and Megatron turned to the smirking seeker.

“We go when I say so,” he answered, and once again Starscream bowed and hopped back to his trine, smirk still intact.

Megatron looked around more this time, searching for the small insecticon that soon enough found its way to his side, glass wings buzzing. No one else seemed to notice the bugbot or simply acted like it had always accompanied Megatron and glided their optics over it, but Megatron focused on it. He still felt uneasy in his core and couldn't think of anything to say, but half expected some sort of a lecture or at least an explanation.

None came, and Megatron turned to look forward to his looming fortress. “What was that about?” he asked as calmly as he could manage.

“The reality,” Primus answered as patient as ever, repeating themselves. “You might have dreamed of it differently before, but in reality after you have crushed his army and executed his closest comrades and friends he won't come to you full of happiness.”

“I know that. I knew Optimus, he had a strong spark,” Megatron grunted back though his dentae. “I was surprised by the circumstances, that is all.”

“Let's try again, then,” Primus answered. Megatron didn't bother to say anything back.

The march to the fortress was completed in the exact same way as the time before, all the way to the last detail. The crowd was the same, the chant was the same and when they arrived at the town square Starscream, his seekers and Soundwave saluted him and took off just like before.

The feeling of déjà vu didn't leave Megatron the entire time he was in the elevator and only got worse when he entered the corridor at the top level. He stared at the closed door for a klik and listened to any sounds of distress or struggle but heard none.

Primus flew to the ceiling again and the whirl of their wings died down.

Megatron walked to the door and already had his servo on the lock panel when he stilled for a reason he couldn't name. He realized he wished Optimus had never defied him in the first place. That way everything would be so much easier and there would be no need to sort things out the hard way, but that couldn't be helped right now. An image of Optimus chained and bruised rose to his mind before he had even opened the door, a threatening reminder of the sight that was waiting for him.

But this was simply a vision. None of this was real, and Megatron feared no dream. He opened the door and stepped in to the room.

This time Megatron didn't waste any time looking around but focused on the kneeling Prime right away.

Optimus lifted his helm and looked at him with the same burning fury as before.

“Megatron,” Optimus grunted, yanking at his chains.” Is this what you think of me?! This is what you do to your enemies?! Don't you have *anything* decent left in you anymore?!”

This time Megatron knew this would happen, and he didn't need to be shocked or glossa-tied. He put his servos behind his back, scoffed and calmly approached his captive.

“Don't be a fool, Optimus,” he said, rolling his optics. “I haven't done or ordered any of this, so stop making such a fuss.”

Optimus closed his mouth but followed the warlord with his gaze. There was no denying his posture was still tense but there was more doubt than hatred in his optics now. Megatron barely suppressed a satisfied chuckle: Optimus had always been and would always be about second chances and seeing good in others, and that was the angle Megatron had to play to in order to win this battle.

Megatron walked past Optimus and to the other side of the room where there were the energon storage and drawers full of everyday tools. Megatron pulled open a drawer at random, found what he needed right away, picked up a cube of energon and walked back to his captive. He knelt down before Optimus, who in turn leaned back to put some space between them.

Megatron glared at him but softened his gaze soon as he eyed the leaking wounds on the side of the smaller mech's face. The place where the battlemask had been torn off looked even crueler up close, but Megatron had seen far worse during his function. He picked up a soft, puffy sponge and a bottle of rinsing liquid, soaked the sponge with it and slowly reached for Optimus' faceplate. He took a careful hold of his chin, pressed the sponge against the open wound and watched it turn dark blue with energon. When the sponge was full and started to leak energon and rinsing liquid Megatron squeezed it dry over the floor without a care about the mess, soaked the sponge again and wiped Optimus' faceplate clean as gently as he could manage.

Optimus simply let him work and didn't flinch once during the procedure even though the rough tears must have stung and prickled. He didn't look directly at Megatron and didn't utter a word, just stared over the warlord's shoulder with his spinal strut rigidly stiff.

When the leaking had stopped and Megatron was content with his work he dropped the sponge and picked up the energon cube.

“Here, you need to fuel up. You must be famished,” Megatron said and offered the fuel.

Instinctively Optimus tried to lift his servos to take the offered cube, but the chain was too short. The wild look was back in his optics as they flickered between his own useless servos, the much needed fuel just in front of him and Megatron's face.

“You have me beaten and chained in hopes it will break me, and now you are going to feed me like a beast, Megatron?” Optimus said slowly like he couldn't quite believe it.

“Don't insult me like that, Optimus,” Megatron snapped back. “I am above such things! You on the other hand should learn to accept help when it's offered.”

He lifted the cube closer to the other mech who eyed it again, this time less suspicious and more considering. Megatron pushed the cube a bit closer, and when Optimus didn't turn his helm away

put it against his lipplates.

Megatron watched in silence as Optimus drank. He had been right, the Prime was in desperate need of refueling and once he had gotten the first taste of nourishment he couldn't resist anymore. Optimus kept his optics offline as he drank, and Megatron didn't want to do anything to disturb this small quiet moment between them so he just kept his servos steady and tilted the cube as the energon was drained from it.

When the last drops of the energon disappeared in Optimus' intake Megatron lowered the cube and let out a pleased hum. "See? I only wanted to help. Are you calm enough so I can loosen these chains?"

Optimus onlined his optics and glared at him before lunging closer and spitting the last mouthful of energon in Megatron's face.

"I am not your pet," Optimus growled straight to the warlord's face. "And my freedom and dignity are not meaningless objects I trade away for a single cube of energon! Either kill me already or at least have the decency to toss me into the same prison with my fellow Autobots!"

Megatron almost trembled with anger as the wasted energon trickled down his faceplate and onto his chassis. "Are you that eager to rust away with your precious little followers?" he hissed with his denta bared.

"Anywhere is better than in this disgusting little cage with you," Optimus replied coldly. "Autobots who believe in freedom and justice are all the good left of Cybertron, and where ever they are is my place as well. That is true loyalty, Megatron. It runs both ways. But the likes of you wouldn't know anything about that!"

Megatron bit the inside of his intake until he tasted his own energon. He had to admit that this vision was a dead-end.

"Reset," he muttered aloud like surrendering and the room disappeared.

The crowd was celebrating and chanting Megatron's name. The road through Kaon was open and at the end of it loomed the dark fortress.

"Shall we march, my Lord?" Starscream's voice asked and Megatron turned to the smirking seeker.

"We go when I say so," he answered and watched the smirking seeker step back with identical steps and an identical smirk as before.

When Megatron made his way through Kaon this time he didn't pay any mind to the crowd or anything else but the little bugbot that flew to his side once again. Megatron's gaze was fixated to the fortress and there was a new kind of determination in his steps.

"How much can I change the dream?" Megatron asked Primus.

"This is your dream. Everything is entirely up to you," the little bug answered.

"Good. No one harms Optimus or puts him in chains, and his precious team is alive. If he wants his rusty cogs in his life he can have them, I can work with that," Megatron listed as he stared ahead at the fortress that they were rapidly closing in on.

The bugbot didn't offer any other input and simply flew by Megatron's side through the march, the square and finally in the elevator.

"You said Optimus was done when he joined the Allspark," Megatron said out of blue half way up.

"It is the truth."

"Well *we* were never done. We still have things to see through," Megatron argued back. Primus didn't answer him, and the elevator doors slid open.

This time behind the door was Optimus who stood tall on his pedes, unharmed and gazing out of the window to the still celebrating crowd below. When Megatron stepped into the room and the door sealed behind him, Optimus turned his helm to acknowledge him. His optics were narrow and cold.

"Greetings, Optimus," Megatron said and slowly made his way to the other mech, but made sure to give him respectful amount of space.

Optimus didn't return the greeting, but followed the warlord with his gaze like he could bolt at any moment and there would be a fight. Naturally none came, but Megatron answered Optimus' steady stare with his own.

Finally Optimus turned to look out of the window again, this time over the city. "So. It is finished then, you have won."

"So I have," Megatron agreed.

"Do you have any plans?" Optimus casually inquired.

"Grand ones, yes."

"And do you plan on killing me here with your own servos, perhaps?"

Even though Megatron had expected something like that it still chilled his spark to hear it said out loud. But whatever death omens Optimus thought he saw in him were hardly worse than the stare of pure hatred before, and Megatron decided he could live with this.

"No, I do not, actually. I've been considering other options lately. After all, you are a Prime- "

"I will not willfully hand the Matrix over to you, nor shall I appoint you as my successor," Optimus promptly said.

"Forget about the Matrix already, it's not important!" Megatron snapped. The conversation was threatening to derail and he wouldn't tolerate that, not again! "When the revolution was still merely catching fire I dreamed of a world were you never left my side and we would rule together. Now that this blasted war is done we could still have that."

Optimus stared at him, completely still and more honestly surprised than Megatron could recall he had ever seen him, and the sight alone made his spark soar and rejoice. He had found a new path to walk, and Optimus had been stirred awake from his monotonous hatred as well. There was a chance.

"What are you talking about?" Optimus asked in a shivering voice, not even trying to hide his disbelief. "How can you still be so blind you believe that I would ever- "

“No more Autobot executions, Optimus,” Megatron quickly interrupted before his good mood was ruined. “Think about that. If you choose to take this task we could do so much good together! My Decepticons are no longer killing your troops, and I can personally guarantee the safety of your team members. All you have to do is simply cooperate.”

Optimus paused to consider his words, and behind his heavy reserved doubt Megatron spotted a small glimmer of hope, pushing through the wall of past experiences and cynicism. Into that little spark of hope Megatron wanted to blow life.

“My team is alive?” Optimus repeated.

“Yes. Your capture ended all fighting, and there were no more casualties.”

Optimus seemed to fight down a sigh of relief, but the way his posture relaxed betrayed how much he had worried. He turned to gaze out of the window again, taking in the vibrant sunset over the city of Kaon, and Megatron turned from him to take in the beautiful sight as well. The city held so many cherished memories, and Megatron knew he could use those.

“It was here where we met and started the breaking of the old chains,” Megatron said. “I remember you from back then, so young and energetic and ready to challenge the world in the name of justice. I know you shared my dream – maybe you still do, Optimus. And you can still have it. You only need to let go of the past and say yes.”

A long moment of silence went past as they stood side by side before the window, bathing in the brilliant orange, yellow and deep pink light of the sunset. The fortress was high enough that the noise from the streets didn't reach the heights, and they had this one quiet moment of beauty all for themselves.

“Yes,” Optimus whispered.

Megatron turned his helm toward him and their gazes met. Megatron fought a smile and lost.

Optimus stayed with him there, sharing the space, the computer and the meals. The only time they weren't together was during the nights when Megatron recharged on his berth and Optimus on the floor by the window with nothing but a pillow and a thermo blanket under him. This dream was the best one yet and Megatron was certain it was going to work, Primus would see that they could and would work together and it was good for everyone and the dream would become real. He had it all figured out, but then day number five came along.

Megatron had been discussing the newly established military with his officers on one of the lower levels of the fortress, when a series of explosion shook the entire building, throwing bots off their pedes and temporarily knocking all electrical systems offline.

“What in the name of- !” Megatron almost swore as he held on to the table. He didn't need to wait for the answer very long when Skywarp popped out of nothingness into the room, yelling: “Autobot contact! The top level is under heavy fire!”

Megatron froze for a split klik. Optimus was on the top floor. He roared in frustration, darted out of the room, into the corridor and all the way outside where he transformed into his altmode and flew all the way to the top of the fortress.

The explosives had almost completely destroyed the top level, effectively blown off the roof and broken every single window on several floors below, and Megatron was just in time to see the all too familiar group of Autobots firing their blasters at him before jumping through a groundbridge

portal, Optimus with them.

“Sorry, Megatron! He's coming with us again!” Ratchet yelled before he too disappeared through the portal that cycled down into nothing again.

Megatron landed on the messy remains of his quarters, now without a roof and most of its walls that were raining down on the ground below. He stood there for a while, trying to process what had just happened and staring at the place where the groundbridge had been before he threw his helm back and released a roar of frustrated rage.

Familiar buzzing of glass wings reached his consciousness and Megatron turned just in time to see Primus flying up and landing on a large chunk of wall next to him.

“Go ahead, mock me,” Megatron growled at the bugbot who rubbed their hinelegs together in a manner that made the metal sing.

“I won't,” Primus replied. “There are impossible tasks. There is no shame in admitting that.”

“No! I am not defeated!” Megatron shouted.

“This is not a competition,” the bugbot calmly said, but Megatron wasn't listening.

“Reset,” he snapped.

*“All hail Megatron! All hail Megatron! All hail Megatron!”*

The crowd was celebrating, the road through Kaon was open and at the end of it loomed the dark fortress. Megatron marched towards it like a mech possessed, ready for another round.

“I will kill them all this time,” Megatron muttered more to himself than to the bugbot flying by his side. “They can't interrupt us if they are dead.”

“I doubt Optimus will appreciate that,” Primus gently reminded him.

“He won't know. He won't be harmed, I will offer him the lives of every remaining Autobot and a chance to make peace. I hope he'll listen to reason for once!”

The sunset was identical to the previous one, wrapping the two mechs in its full warm colours and painting their shadows to the back wall. Optimus said yes and stayed.

Only this time they shared everything: The space, computers and the work, the meals and the berth. Megatron couldn't even be bothered to wonder what it meant to dream within a dream when Optimus lay down next to him, chassis pressing against his side.

Then came the ninth day that went by on wings like the previous ones, and the night fell. They went to berth together, and tonight Megatron dared to wish more.

Optimus always recharged on his left side with his face to Megatron, and Megatron had always recharged on his back. The berth was for two, but with them both together there wasn't much space to spare.

Optimus' vents were deep and calm but not regular enough to indicate he had powered down already. The warm air from his vents puffed against the side of Megatron's helm, and tonight he rolled onto his right side. Optimus' bright blue optics were staring at him in the dark, and he looked

back, reserved but not avoiding. Megatron carefully reached his servo across the narrow space between them and settled it on Optimus' waist. He let his servo glide up the curve of the plating, caressed its side and brushed against the hot wires underneath it. When no objections came he slipped his servo over the hipplate and on the small of the other's back and pulled their frames together. Optimus let out a shaky breath he'd been holding when their panels came in contact. Megatron pulled the other against him harder, ground their frames together and nuzzled his faceplate against the side of Optimus' helm.

Megatron inhaled the scent of the other's frame and the electricity cracking between them and brought both his arms around him and rolled back on his back, pulling Optimus on top of him to straddle his hips.

A sudden sharp pain pierced Megatron's chassis and brought all his systems to a stuttering halt. A warning after a warning popped up into his processor before any error notification made it through the messy sensory information feed, but in the end he didn't need that. He simply used his optics and located a familiar white and turquoise-veined blade sunken almost to the hilt into his chassis, where severed energon lines were spurting out their contents. Optimus was hunched over him, his optics offline and a determined frown on his faceplate, his servo forcing the other one with the blade deeper.

"You murdered my family," he whispered into dark.

Megatron could feel his sensor net shutting down and his frame disappearing from his awareness. "...How did you- ?" His intake filled with energon and drowned his vocalizer so he couldn't finish the question, but he didn't have to.

"You always underestimated my skills with computers," Optimus answered.

The vision was a fiasco. Megatron recalled an old saying about short-lived lies and he would have laughed if he would have had the equipment left to produce such a sound.

"Reset," he mouthed and it was enough.

*"All hail Megatron! All hail Megatron! All hail Megatron!"*

The crowd was celebrating, the road through Kaon was open and at the end of it loomed the dark fortress. Megatron marched towards it like a mech possessed, ready for another round. The buzz of the glass wings followed him but everything he said he said to himself.

"This time... this time it'll be right, I'll *make it* right... Just you wait and see, I'll come out of this on top."

The elevator took him to the highest floor of the fortress as it had before, and this time Megatron marched straight to the door of his quarters without a klik of hesitation in him when he stepped in.

The room was still exactly the same. It bathed in the light of the sunset, and there was a mech in front of the window waiting for him, his frame only a silhouette against the vibrant colours pouring in from the window.

The mech turned around and gave him a polite if chilly smile. "Hello, Megatron."

"Optimus," Megatron replied and walked across the room, wary and reserved of the new setting. Optimus didn't seem to feel the need to make any more casual conversation but patiently waited for

Megatron to make his move, and he decided it would be a good one this time so he walked to the cool cabinet and fetched a cube of energon to hand to the other mech.

Optimus accepted the gift graciously with both servos and turned to look out of the window again. Megatron internally debated the good and bad of opening lines and tactics and mapped out this setting for himself. Optimus was here with him, brought with dignity and without any harm done to him, his Autobots had been captured and those that might come looking for him had been executed quietly. Now he would just have to offer peace and goodness and keep the Prime busy and away from snooping the Decepticon archives and records and it would all be well, if only this Optimus would listen to him. Twice already had he broken through the absolute resistance by offering a chance to rebuild their post-war world, and with a little guidance this would go just right, just according to the plan.

“The war is finally over,” Megatron said.

Optimus nodded once. He was staring over to the horizon and sipping his energon in no hurry. “So it is. And you have won. What do you plan to do with that, I wonder?”

“Rebuild, of course. The filth of the past has been scrubbed away, and it's time to start anew. There will be justice in this world from now on, and no one will be trapped into a role of an outcast or a slave.”

“I see,” Optimus answered neutrally, optics on the horizon.

Megatron took a deep invent of air. “You should join me, Prime. You *are* a Prime, after all. We dreamed of this long ago, didn't we? I know you did too. It doesn't take much, just one little word of agreement and you will have a servo in molding our new world. Just join me and there will be no more meaningless death,” he offered, everything at once.

Optimus looked at him in silence for a few long klicks, not quite serious, not quite frowning and not quite smiling. But he nodded, and that was all that mattered to Megatron.

“Good,” Megatron said and looked out to the crowded city. “I'm so glad you see that it's better for everyone like this. We've fought enough for a dozen lifetimes, haven't we? It's time for a change, and you know I hate to be stuck on a mundane task.”

He turned to Optimus, expecting a response but received only an expressionless stare. He frowned. He thought he had played this right and wouldn't receive any more resistance and he could already feel his spark sinking. “Just accept it, Optimus. I know you hated every cycle of the war.”

Optimus turned his optics to the window again. “Yes. This is good.”

A wave of relief rushed over Megatron as the vision held the right course and he didn't have to ask Primus to reset it again. He dared to dream of the sweet taste of victory as he measured Optimus' profile with his optics and let himself stay in the moment for a little longer.

After that things went along smoothly. The dream world settled on peace time rather well, and each day the streets were a bit cleaner, there was a few less ruins and more new buildings. Megatron's former officers were now serving him and the planet in a different manner, all leading on a field that fit them the best and reporting back to him and by proxy to Optimus who was always by his side.

They went everywhere together even when Megatron didn't ask the other to accompany him, and sometimes he wondered if his dream was trying to tell him he had been lonely all this time.



Optimus didn't talk much, but then again he really hadn't ever done so in the first place, not after some time had passed since they'd first met. Megatron's first impression of Orion Pax had been a complete and utter chatter box, and they had flooded each other with ideas and arguments and theories and insight until the early morning cycles, but the impression had had a reconstruction after they had spilled everything urgent to each other. Megatron had realized Orion had held all his opinions and ideas to himself and that he had been the first – and for a while the only – one he could talk to, but more often Orion had preferred to listen more than to speak.

In this dream Optimus was more like that: Calm, present and always listening. Megatron rather liked that. What he didn't like so much was that one another being was also almost completely silent, and that was Primus who hadn't uttered a word the entire time, just skittered about the fortress, mostly on the ceiling. But on the flip-side the silence made them also very easy to ignore, and since they rarely rose to the glass wings anymore Megatron completely forgot about them for long cycles at a time.

After several weeks in the dream, on the last day of the working week they were making their way to the conference room on the lower levels to receive the weekly reports from Megatron's officers, and it was time to bring up the difficult subject of the prisoners of war.

“We have thousands of Autobot prisoners, some still in our custody. Most of them have been granted some sort of a low-level working position to get them out of the camps, but there are still those whom we just can't let go like that. Officers, special unit soldiers, people like that,” Megatron explained to Optimus who walked by his side, optics fixed on him.

“There have been propositions of simply keeping them as prisoners and putting them to work in either factories or on the construction sites, but also of re-establishing a prison asteroid or one of the old moon bases. What do you think?” Megatron finished and waited for input. He was genuinely interested in Optimus' opinion since he hadn't made a decision yet, but he was also testing how Optimus would react to the subject of Autobot prisoners. It was a risky play, but it had to be seen through in case all the work on this vision was in vain.

“I see,” Optimus simply said and was quiet for a moment. It was impossible to tell by just looking at his face if he was finished or thinking, but Megatron gave the latter option a chance and finally Optimus added: “Maintaining peace and efficiency are the important things.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Megatron answered, pleased.

They arrived at the conference room a few klikcycles before the officers arrived with their reports, and the meeting went on for over a cycle when each one gave their presentation and Megatron commented. Optimus was silent the entire time and concentrated on his chosen role as a stenographer. At the end of the meeting he already had complete minutes prepared for all partakers and one for the records.

The meeting was finished, the copies of the minutes sent to each one's personal datapad and all rose, ready to return to their duties. Only Starscream loitered behind, and when all others had left and only the three of them remained the seeker walked up to Megatron.

“Lord Megatron, I trust you have been well,” Starscream greeted in an overly sweet tone and with a bow.

Megatron covered his annoyance with cold professionalism. “I have. Now cut the pleasantries and state your intentions.”

Starscream almost curtsied and his smile grew wider. “I have no other intention but to exchange

pleasantries!” he said even though Megatron hadn't returned his gesture and clearly had no intention to, either. “But people are talking, my Lord, and being the bravest one I thought I would inquire you directly.”

“Brave or rude,” Megatron noted, and Starscream hummed a polite laugh.

“Maybe, but nevertheless, people are wondering might we by any chance be hosting a royal bonding ceremony any time soon?” the seeker smoothly asked.

Megatron knew what Starscream was getting at, but he would rather not comment on the matter, especially not now when Optimus stood right next to him. Maybe the silence wasn't the best course of action either, because Starscream took it as a permission to attempt to fish the answer out of the other mech in stead.

“How about you, Prime? Are we about to see you take up vows any time soon?”

Optimus tilted his helm and kept a neutral appearance. “I do not know,” he said. “What do you want, Megatron?”

Megatron chuckled, satisfied with Prime's reply. “I want Starscream to get lost and back to work.”

“Then he should do just that,” Optimus said with the same calm manner as before, and Starscream didn't stay to argue, simply bowed and strode out of the room.

Megatron watched the seeker go and made sure the door was shut before he turned back to Optimus. “That was such a waste of time. Come, let us return to our quarters.”

“Very well,” Optimus agreed and followed Megatron into the corridor and to the elevator.

But even though Megatron had ordered Starscream out and finished the subject with Optimus, he realized he couldn't shake it off that easily. He hadn't ever thought of bonding with anyone, but if there was one bot he wouldn't mind spending the rest of his existence with it would be Optimus. He glanced at the mech by his side, but Optimus wasn't looking at him or at really anything, apparently deep in thought. Suddenly Megatron thought of Primus and remembered this was just a dream, a dream that had a purpose. It was a test of some sort, to show Primus that he deserved to have Optimus return with him from the Well.

He glanced at the mech by his side and for the first time wondered if he truly was just a dream image. Primus had explained that these dreams were everything Megatron wanted but with one crucial aspect changed from dream to reality.

*This is the reality of your dream.*

Optimus had been the one aspect that had gone wrong on his previous tries while everything was exactly like Megatron wanted it. His spark jumped in its chamber when the possibility of standing next to the real Optimus truly hit him.

The larger frame tackled against the lighter one and both mechs hit the elevator door as Megatron seized a hold of both Optimus' shoulders, pressed him between the wall and his own frame and captured him in a harsh kiss. His dentae clacked against Optimus' but he didn't let that ruin the moment. His lipplates had little room to move against the other pair, so hard he was pressing against the other, but he did his best, trying to feast in the wet heat of the kiss and make the contact as tight as possible in the process.

Their lipplates made a soft wet sound when they parted, but connected again almost right after.

Megatron kept his optics offline and dived into another deep kiss, then another and was about to go for a third one when his clouded mind managed to put one thought through: Optimus wasn't kissing him back.

Megatron pulled back enough to take a proper look at Optimus and became aware that not only wasn't Optimus kissing him back but he wasn't doing anything else either. He wasn't embracing him, caressing him or clinging to him, hadn't even offlined his optics. His face held the same calm expression as before, and now from close range it looked almost passive. He was simply existing there, in Megatron's hold and pressed against his frame, enduring what was happening to him.

A cold, clammy feeling took over Megatron and the flame of his spark dimmed considerably like it had received a splash of icy water. He carefully let go of Optimus and took a step back.

"My apologies," he mumbled. The elevator's light went out signaling they were at the top floor, and the doors slid open. Optimus followed him out but kept a few steps between them when they walked through the corridor to the door.

"There's no need for an apology," Optimus said to Megatron who put in the keycode and entered the quarters.

Megatron threw him a disbelieving glance and met nothing but that calmness he had been pleased with before, but now it was frustrating him. "And why is that?" he demanded. "Why shouldn't I apologize? You didn't want that, so I'm sorry. It's that simple."

Optimus tilted his helm to the side and blinked slowly. "Did you want me to kiss you as well?"

Megatron walked to the fuel storage to open a fresh bottle of high grade and barked a bitted laugh. "That is the general wish of anyone who kisses someone."

Optimus stood before the window and watched quietly as Megatron took out an empty cube and poured himself a drink. The evening cycle was reaching its end but the sky was covered with dark clouds and instead of bright colours there was only a gray dusk. "Would you like me to kiss you now?" Optimus asked.

Megatron had just emptied the cube and the question prompted such a rush of anger inside him it made him slam the cube on the counter, breaking it in half. Optimus didn't even flinch, didn't even glance at the halves of the shattered cube on the counter or lose any of his cool. The unreadable expression started to truly annoy Megatron, and he wasn't going to cover it.

"What is it with you?" he snapped.

"What do you mean?" Optimus asked in return, servos lightly pressed together before him and everything in his posture relaxed, not returning or responding to any signals Megatron was sending him.

"What is it with you?! What are you doing?! You were completely unresponsive in the elevator when I kissed you, and now you're suddenly offering it?! I think I made my intentions very clear, so what is it with you?!" Megatron vented and circled the counter to come face to face with the Prime.

Optimus regarded him calmly, not letting a single emotion escape him. "You didn't state a request. I didn't know what you wanted, so I didn't do anything," he explained blandly.

Megatron snorted. "And here I thought you'd be above wising off, Prime!"

Optimus raised an optic ridge. Megatron stared him in the optics with a challenging frown, daring and expecting him to say something, anything, but nothing came. Megatron's frustration grew even more and he started to feel the familiar urge to break something if only to get some sort of a reaction out of Optimus.

“Are you even a living being?!” Megatron asked, and the question came out as a shout.

“Of course I am,” Optimus answered patiently. “What is it that you want?”

Megatron growled, threw his servos in the air and started to pace in front of the other. “Haven't I already made that extremely clear?! What part you can't grasp, Prime?!”

“What do you want?” Optimus repeated, and not even in a tone that would have indicated he was answering Megatron's question, he was simply repeating himself, detached from everything; the situation, the emotion, and Megatron.

“I want *you*, you piece of glitching software! I want to be with you, talk with you, rule with you, interface with you, argue with you and have you by my side! How hard is that to understand?!” Megatron yelled to Optimus' face and still got back nothing more than the infuriatingly calm look.

“So could you function like a living, thinking being for one klik and just talk to me!” Megatron snarled.

Optimus was silent and blinked for a few time, nothing on his face faltering and Megatron started to feel a hint of desperation before the Prime opened his mouth to speak. “But you didn't want me to think,” he said.

It was Megatron's turn to still and stare. The conversation was taking a turn he neither understood nor had predicted. “What?”

“You wanted me to listen to your reason and just say yes. To say things you approved and agreed with so you could have this vision of yours to come true,” Optimus explained. “So here I am, at your disposal.”

The confusion Megatron felt started to melt and twist into something that resembled fear. A cold slippery thing was slithering down into the bottom of his tank as the words sank in like a dagger laced with poison. An old wound in his chassis started to throb again.

“What?” was the only thing he could utter, hoping Optimus would take his words back and do away with the truth.

None of that happened, the Prime simply nodded.

“I never wanted that! I never asked that!” Megatron tried to argue even though he started to see the gaping holes in his own claim. Optimus didn't even bother to answer that but simply kept looking at the warlord with that same steady look that Megatron was starting to see wasn't calm but dull.

“What do you want? I want you to tell me what do you want for yourself,” Megatron said in a desperate attempt to shake the drone-like image off the mech before him.

“I want what you want,” Optimus replied, his voice as apathetic as his optics.

“No, I didn't ask- “ Megatron paused himself, knowing fully well what he had asked. “I don't want anything. What do you want then?”

“Nothing,” was the simple answer. “I am yours to command and to do with what you want. I don't think.”

Megatron started pacing again, walking in a half circle before the creature that looked exactly like Optimus but was nothing on the inside, just a version he had created for himself. He didn't know which part terrified him more. Optimus didn't say anything now when he wasn't asking him questions, and his optics were passively tracking his pacing. The unresponsive apathy was horrific to look at, and Megatron wanted nothing more than to wipe it away.

“You have to think! You can't exist without thinking!” he argued.

“I exist according to your wishes. That is how I please you, without causing trouble,” Optimus answered. It all sounded so bland and expressionless, like his whole personality drive had been wiped along with his free will and emotion circuits, leaving behind nothing but an automatic doll with a spark to be played with. Megatron felt sick.

“You can't just obey me! You hate me! I crushed your armies, conquered your cities! I have murdered all your comrades and friends!” Megatron confessed in one last attempt to pierce through the cocoon of apathy, all in vain. Nothing on Optimus' face moved. There was no anger and no grief, not a single trace of anything that resembled the bot whose face the drone was wearing.

“You're not real,” Megatron said aloud in attempt to anchor himself back to reality. “You're not Optimus!”

“Yes, I am. I am the one you wanted,” the dream image before him said.

Megatron swallowed thickly. Along the cold fear the anger was lifting its head again, spitting fire into his hydraulics and telling him to attack, to destroy everything, but especially that unnatural serenity before him and then reset. He clenched his servos into fist, his sword itching to manifest itself from the components of his right arm. He found his voice again and channeled all the rage into it: “You are not Optimus! I know Optimus, and he is a strong and proud and intelligent warrior, he knows what he wants and speaks his mind! He's kind to the extent of stupidity and he most certainly would tell me to go get scrapped if I overstepped his boundaries! **YOU ARE NOT OPTIMUS, AND I! DON'T! WANT! YOU!**”

“But do you want the real Optimus either?”

It was not the mech before him who spoke, but a gentle voice that had been silent for a long while and was coming from the ceiling. Megatron looked up and into the deep optics of the small bugbot who had been observing the escalation of the situation with their dark optics.

Megatron didn't have a response. He stared at the bugbot for a while before turning back to the image of Optimus before him and suddenly felt unsteady on his pedes. He thought of taking a few steps back and leaning on the counter, but even that was too far away. He let his pedes give out and sat on the floor, crossing his legs. This was a dead-end like the visions before, but considering requesting another reset made him feel even more tired. He had already wasted weeks on this one and got nothing from it unless the unpleasant new information about his own attitudes counted.

Primus flew down from the ceiling and landed on the floor next to Megatron.

“Do you wish to try again?” they asked.

Megatron sighed, glanced at Optimus who had at some point turned to stare out of the window into the falling darkness, stretched his neck and turned to Primus. “What's the point of all this?”

Primus stretched their wings under the white shimmering hood of their back and shrugged. "I thought you were going to win."

"But what? What am I competing for? Are you going to return Optimus to life if I accomplish whatever you think I should?" Megatron asked anxiously. He was practically glowing restlessness and frustration, like a beast in a cage too small.

Primus hummed gently, a sound something akin to laughter. "I didn't say this is a competition or a task of any sort. You came to that conclusion by yourself, Megatron."

"Then what is this?! What do you want?!" Megatron demanded with a sneer, dentae flashing and claws denting the metal of his own palms.

"Oh my little creation..." Primus sighed. "I made this dream for you to learn."

"To learn *what*?" Megatron snapped.

"You asked me to bring Optimus Prime back to life and *to you*. You wanted him back but for you, and I cannot do that. Each spark shines for themselves, never for anyone else. That is the nature of life, and I won't create anyone to be possessed," Primus explained, their voice clear and warm.

"I didn't ask that!" Megatron argued.

"And I know you didn't," Primus assured him, "but you didn't know what you wanted. Maybe you did truly want the strong and opinionated Optimus back, but you were in denial about the clash between his personality and yours as well as about the things that have transpired between you. He might reject you, and here we are witnessing how much you don't want that to happen."

Primus's voice wasn't accusing or judgmental, but Megatron turned his optics away and instead looked at the dream-Optimus who was standing where he had been left and staring out the window. Megatron wondered if he even had the will to focus his optics to the view instead of the glass.

Megatron turned his own gaze to the window. It had started to rain outside. The atmosphere was still heavy with coal dust, traces of smoke and fire so the drops that drummed the glass and the streams that ran down it were black. "I just want to see him again," Megatron said.

"And if he won't be happy to see you?" Primus asked, urging him on.

"I'm almost certain he won't be," Megatron chuckled humorlessly, shaking his helm. "Just as long as it's him, I want to meet him at least one more time."

Primus stretched their glass wings again. "And if he won't stay with you?"

Megatron groaned with tired frustration and glared at the bugbot. "It doesn't matter! Didn't you hear me? *I just want to see him*, that's all!"

"I heard you alright," Primus hummed. "I just wish you would properly consider the possibility of you two really being star-crossed lovers, never to be together."

"I have considered that," Megatron grunted, "and I don't care. Besides we crossed paths for the first time in Kaon a million stellar cycles ago and never were proper lovers, so I think it's time to give that a shot to see what happens."

Primus rose to their wings and the darkness from the outside fell into the room. Megatron's optics

tried to readjust to the new surroundings, blinking offline and online again and again when finally they found the right settings.

It was bright again and the floor under Megatron's faceplate was cool. He tried to move, and his frame creaked and groaned in protest. He pressed himself off the floor, his joints stiff and several systems struggling to reboot and slowly realized he was back in the strange white hall he had started in. He looked down at the floor and saw the mass of clouds had turned into the colours of storms, marking the place where his frame had laid, and the electricity from his systems manifested as a small thunder storm that was slowly traveling downwards.

“Good morning,” greeted the voice of Primus somewhere from the distance.

Megatron pushed himself to his pedes and looked for the source of the voice. The ladder he had first seen Primus sitting upon had moved further along the wall and was now almost several hundred meters from their original place. Primus had clearly returned to work while Megatron had slept.

Megatron approached the painter with uncertain steps and stopped next to the ladder.

“Did I pass?” he asked.

Primus chuckled with good nature and shook their helm. “Oh, Megatron... It wasn't a test. Let me ask you a question instead: Did you learn something?”

The question shouldn't have been as hard to answer as it was. Megatron still felt drowsy after the unknown amount of time he had spent in the dream, and he felt like he had been forced to unlock thoughts and wishes he had kept away for a very long time. It was difficult to say what he had learned and what he had just admitted to himself, or grasp what – if anything – had changed, the flood of new or altered knowledge so great he would have needed a moment or a few to properly sort them out. Luckily Primus seemed perfectly alright with him taking those moments while they kept painting, and Megatron was quiet.

“I learned that I miss Optimus,” he finally said. “So much that I don't care how our encounter turns out.”

“You still want him to return just for you,” Primus noted with a click of their glossa.

Megatron shrugged. “Maybe so. I am a selfish person by nature, that can't be helped. But I just want to see him again, that's all. Whatever he wants to do after that, he can.”

Primus set down their paintbrush and turned to smile at Megatron. “Being selfish is not necessarily a bad quality, and certainly not your worst. There, take that ladder up. You might need to climb for quite some time though.”

They pointed at something behind Megatron. He turned to look at a pillar right behind him and saw a ladder bolted against its side, climbing up all the way to the strange void of a ceiling and apparently beyond that.

“I told you Optimus isn't here, didn't I?” Primus said and Megatron turned back to them. “My Primes are tending to him right now. Go. I hope you get what you wish for.”

Goodbyes were unnecessary since one day they would meet again, and Megatron silently walked to the ladder on the pillar and started to climb.

## Chapter End Notes

Oh, Megatron. His battle prowess isn't helping with the matters of the spark. Did anyone notice how much I love grand mythical things, magic and deities and adding them to scifi?

Thank you for reading, dear reader! Leave kudos if you liked what you just read, and if you want to win my love and eternal gratefulness, leave a comment below!



# Visions are seldom all they seem

## Chapter Notes

Here it is, at last! My usual beta reader opted out of this one, and my darling friend Chakatai (beekeepercain.tumblr.com) came to my aid instead! Give him your love, he's not even in TF fandom but helped me anyway. <3

It's a long chapter, and I am so terribly sorry the update took this long, but I hope you have been patient with me and still are interested to know where this story is going. I am... quite proud of this one, I dare to say. And the warning about graphic violence is really needed, so heads up.

So go ahead and read! As always, kudos and comments sustain me, and I would be very interested in hearing your thoughts.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

For the longest time Optimus didn't know anything but darkness and serenity. His sentience was scattered and faint without a physical form to bind it, nonexistent enough that he wasn't aware of himself but there enough for him to realize time had gone by when he was brought about again.

His oblivious death was interrupted gently as if he was slowly coming out of a long and deep sleep. He didn't have any sensors nor was his spark contained in a frame, he was but a floating wisp of a thought that slowly grew stronger, but he knew he had had a name. He had been something different once.

There was a plane of existence for the living beings, he recalled. There were thoughts that reached the level of consciousness which in turn occupied frames on yet another level of being. He had been one of those once.

This oblivion was nothingness, a state of something else in a place he didn't have the presence of mind to name, and when he started to become aware again he slipped out of it.

Then suddenly he had a frame again. His pedes touched soft ground, and his sensors were slowly coming online and neuroconnections all over his frame were rebooting themselves. His awareness lit up again in full force, and for a moment he was terribly confused and afraid. The lights, the sound, the taste of air, the smell of space and the ground under his pedes, even the air molecules against his plating assaulted his newly activated sensors so hard he could just stay still, paralyzed and overwhelmed.

Time went by, and after a klik or a cycle the pain dulled. His name was Optimus, and this was his rebirth.

The realm of Primes was located among the endless sea of constellations, fields of cosmic mist, lit by comets and distant stars and nebulae but it was also like a cradle in the crook of the arm of Primus. Simultaneously close and far far away from everything.

It was unreachable from some realms, simply invisible to others, and as Optimus took his first steps in it he thought that despite its appearance it couldn't be completely physical.

Those of The Thirteen present regarded the new arrival from a distance with mixed opinions.

“Regards from Alpha Trion,” Nexus muttered, mostly to himself.

“So that is the Last of the Primes,” Micronus said, leaning forward on his place and tilting his helm to this way and that, openly curious.

“Who else would it be?” Amalgamous snorted with amusement.

“I just said what everyone else was thinking,” Micronus answered, underlying his patience with a soft tone of voice. “And he is to return to answer a new threat?”

He directed his words to Prima, who was more interested in manipulating the bright mist into swirls with his digits than in the new arrival. But nevertheless, he answered: “Yes, that is the word of Primus.”

Someone scoffed at him, but Micronus nodded. “Interesting,” he remarked, stroking his chin, “and how does that involve us?”

“We test and train him of course! Haven't you ever read a single fable?” Amalgamous chuckled with a grin.

“This is not a fable, this is reality,” Micronus dryly said, but Amalgamous just kept laughing.

“Fables come from real inspiration! You can't say which was first, the story or the legend,” he said and Micronus rolled his optics at the trickster.

“Behave, you two. We have a task,” Prima calmly said.

“Good point,” Onyx grumbled through his clicking maw of a predacon. “But who is his foe to be? We need to know at least that much before we can determine what he needs to practice.”

All optics turned to Prima, who didn't bother lifting his from his servos. “According to my interpretation, an old evil is about to return and Optimus will face it, and we are to prepare him for it.”

“And you are sure about that?” Micronus asked, narrowing his optics.

Prima shrugged and ushered the mist to obscure a passing comet, making its deep blue turn into shining purple. “The translation is always tricky. 'Old' could also be 'former' as well as 'historical', but he is about to have a trial like no other before soon.”

Nexus joined the conversation: “That is all charming and dandy, but why do we need to blindly try out something? Vector Prime, you have the power over space and time. Haven't you seen everything regardless of time, so you know what the future holds?”

“I gazed upon the life span of Optimus Prime when I spent time outside the limits of space time, yes,” Vector answered languidly. “But since I didn't have much interest in it, I didn't pay attention.”

“Why doesn't that surprise me?” Onyx grunted to himself, laying his helm down to rest on his front paws.

“You are all talk and no action,” Micronus huffed and sprang up from this place. “It's all the same with you big bots. Start with the tests or I will!”

“Very well then. I will take the first round with the youngling. Let's see how well he is in touch

with his primal self,” Onyx Prime said and raised his enormous frame to his four paws. Others near the beastformer gave way as he spread his four wings that lifted his frame off the ground like it weighted nothing.

Amalgamous crossed his legs under himself and pulled his bottomless box of sweet rust-sticks out of his sub-space. “This is marvelous! I have so many ideas, so many puzzles for him! Now how can I choose just a few...” he chattered away, his voice fading into a mumble as he talked to himself and others left him be.

“Stay with your assigned tasks,” Prima reminded them.

“Oh don't be like that!” Nexus argued. “Remember, we are testing a Prime who was ready to put every tradition and fundamental function of a society into a scrapper!”

“I am too old and exhausted for this exercise, thus I will not participate,” Vector declared out of the blue and disappeared in the midst of the stars. The others watched him go, and no one tried to stop him.

“So typical,” Micronus scoffed with a shake of his helm.

“Let him be,” Prima sighed.

When Onyx Prime was done, Nexus took the next turn to meet the youngest Prime. By the time he was done, Amalgamous was all too eager to dip into his bag of tricks and meet the new-comer to test his sense of humor, and he took his time with that. Quintus and Alchemist expressed little interest to the whole ordeal and were thus skipped, and Prima surprised everyone by forgetting about the stars and comets for a moment to meet the young Prime.

“He has wielded my Star Saber,” he answered to a question no one dared to ask. “I want to inspect his art of swords close up.”

When Prima stepped before Optimus, Micronus was still yet to have his turn and was visibly anxious to get out there, mumbling to himself about big bots not being thorough enough. He was pacing around and not paying any mind to people around him, and for that Solus Prime was grateful.

Solus Prime had little interest in the change in her usual routine, and despite all the commotion and chatter around her she just floated in the air on her own little shred of stardust, tinkering with a little puzzlebox. One of the Primes who had until now stayed quiet and aside stepped closer to her.

“I know what the old evil Primus spoke of is,” Megatronus said to her.

Solus didn't lift her gaze from the puzzle in her servo, but couldn't bring herself to completely ignore the other Prime. “Prima said the translation is tricky and he couldn't be entirely certain of the message,” she said.

Megatronus snorted with distaste. “I am in many ways better than Prima.”

“So you keep insisting,” Solus said with a voice colder than the void of space.

Megatronus didn't let that discourage him, but pressed on: “Aren't you interested what that runt of a Prime will face?”

“Not in particular. Things have a tendency to sort themselves out, and I am certain that Vector Prime would have recalled a catastrophic future. Optimus Prime has walked a successful path so

far, and I have faith in him. I am not planning to set a trial for him here,” Solus said, turning the puzzle around in her servos, her delicate digits testing its multiple components and edges.

“Vector Prime is a senile fool,” Megatronus scoffed dismissively. Solus didn't seem interested in talking to him a single word more, and he shuffled his pedes in frustration. In an attempt to perk her interest he went on without further prompting: “I'm certain that if you knew the nature of this so called evil you'd take interest, Solus Prime.”

The femme didn't seem to take the bait but kept tinkering away with her mundane creation, but despite his annoyance Megatronus couldn't help himself: “He's to face the gladiator cog who took my name.”

Solus lifted her gaze from her creation to ahead of her, like she barely stopped herself from turning to Megatronus and seeing his self-satisfied grin.

“What say you, should we make up a trial for the youngling together? This is our area of expertise after all,” Megatronus suggested with a toxic smirk on his dark features.

Solus lowered her gaze back to her little project. “Please stop talking to me and go away, Fallen.”

Optimus had his servos full with Micronus Prime's lectures and tests. The Prime of minicons put considerably more effort, tactic and time to his tests than the previous primes, and kept talking about the future challenges he was preparing him for while keeping Optimus so busy he didn't have time to ask any of the questions he had. An unrealistic threat simulation after another followed as Micronus created fields and tracks for him to fight his way through and protect the make-belief humans that served as a reminder what was at stake, and he had to shove his doubts about their usefulness aside unless he wanted another lecture from the small Prime.

No matter how many electric shocks he suffered, no matter how much he had to push his frame to get through each scenario, Optimus kept worrying about his human allies back on Earth as well as about Bumblebee whom the fate had led back on the blue planet as well. It was amazing how big a role that remote little planet that bloomed with organic life played in the affairs of Cybertronians.

The cryptic advice and vague warnings from the primes had made Optimus restless and confused, and those feelings threatened to distract him from his training. He couldn't help it, all this talk of an “ancient evil” or “old foe” that not even the primes among themselves agreed on what to call was frustratingly formless an enemy to prepare for.

Then in the middle of the swamp-like field with pits full of scourging lava appeared a bot that was different from the automatic drones Micronus used for his exercises. This one didn't only look different with their black plating decorated with ominously glowing purple runes but acted different as well. The bot didn't move with simple programmed combinations of attacks but observed the surroundings and made independent decisions.

Optimus lowered his new sword he had just learned how to use and measured the intruder with his gaze. “Micronus,” Optimus called, “are they part of this exercise?”

Micronus Prime drifted through the air next to Optimus and peered at the arrival with narrowed optics. He seemed to recognize them because he groaned in annoyance. “No, he's not,” he said to Optimus, then raised his voice so the mech in the field could hear: “I am not done yet! Wait for your own turn!”

The black mech started to make his way to them, and when he took the first step the bright red lava cooled and solidified at his pedes. The fire went out and everything turned to gray and black, and the scourging heat dropped to almost chilly.

“You have had enough, Micronus! None of this will be useful to him anyway, so you might as well give way to those stronger and wiser,” the mech shouted back.

Micronus mumbled something vicious to himself and turned to Optimus. “We are done. I hope for the sakes of you and our people that this was enough. Now I give way to the disgrace among us, and bid you farewell.”

With that Micronus Prime faded and disappeared as if he had turned into bits of data and vanished into a stream Optimus couldn't see.

So he turned his optics to the mech approaching him. The black mech was considerably larger than Optimus, his armor was heavy and bulky full of viciously sharp edges and spikes that made him a picture of a soldier dressed for the joys of slaughter.

Optimus didn't look away from his new challenger. This was the Realm of Primes and thus there was only one possible answer to the question-

“Do you know who I am?” the mech asked in a falsely soft tone.

Optimus nodded. “I do, yes.”

The black mech made a light encouraging gesture with his servo. “Go on, tell me. Say my name, youngling.”

“Your name is stricken from our history. To us you are simply The Fallen, the traitor,” Optimus answered, casually making sure he was holding his new weapon steadily in case he offended the former Prime.

The Fallen just grinned. “You can strike my name all you want, but I see I haven't been forgotten. Now that Micronus has been sent to bother someone else with his meaningless little practices, we have a perfect chance to get to know each other a little better.”

“I am not sure I'd like that,” Optimus answered, his voice cold like the void of space.

“I am not asking your opinion on the matter,” The Fallen answered and waved his servo. It turned out he had just as much power over the Realm as the other primes despite his status as a disgrace, and Optimus watched Micronus' training field disappear out of the way of a new structure. On The Fallen's command the fields of mist and the sky full of constellations and comets were buried under pavement, streets, traffic signs, bridges and then entire buildings that seemed to sprout out of the ground like living things. An entire city was building itself around them, and when the roads were finished the people arrived with them. A neverending flood of traffic, bots driving in their vehicle modes as well as casually walking in groups filled the streets, and Optimus and The Fallen became a part of the crowd.

Optimus was so in awe he forgot himself for a moment and just looked around, taking in his surroundings that were now so completely different from before he could have believed they had transported into an actual city. Just when he turned his helm to look up to the sky above the low buildings he saw strange constellations and too bright nebulae shining through the dark veil stretching above like the ceiling of a tent.

“Impressed?” The Fallen asked.

Optimus turned to look at him. "You seem to be able to exercise great power over this place."

"Yes, I am indeed very powerful. Isn't it irritating when someone you despise is better than you?"

Optimus didn't answer, and The Fallen didn't expect him to. The taller mech turned to another direction and began to walk down the street. "Come, you young runt of a Prime! Let us begin with your trial."

There wasn't any other option but to follow, and just when he took his first step the new weapon he had been granted turned into a shred of a cloud in his servos, disappearing.

"You're not going to use that," The Fallen said over his shoulder.

Instead of wasting breath to argue Optimus hurried to his side and asked: "What is this place and what is the purpose of us being here?"

The Fallen chuckled. "Curious little thing you are. This is the city of Kaon how I remember it. I will give you the first taste of the 'great evil' you will soon face."

Optimus had to admit that he was intrigued. None of the others had had any clear information to offer, and as much as he hated to give the traitor of primes any power over him Optimus wanted to hear what he had to say. "Do you know the nature of my enemy then?"

The Fallen openly laughed, a hoarse sound that didn't express anything akin to genuine joy. He used it to mock. "The others didn't know anything, did they? I am not surprised. People are so self-centered and blunt. Even Prima, our great mighty leader, the Warrior of Light was only interested in seeing what you have done with his precious sword!"

"You did not answer my question," Optimus remarked.

The Fallen clicked his glossa. "Not much of a conversationalist either, little Prime... Yes, I know. And if I am completely honest with you, none of those silly games you played with my brothers will help you."

"And you will give me skills that will?" Optimus asked, openly suspicious.

They turned a corner and walked towards a grand stadium-like building that was higher than any of the buildings around it. It was made out of stone, the colours varying from coal black to pure white, gleaming brown and beautifully smooth gray. It was apparently built in the honor of the Thirteen since great statues of them all were supporting the structures, and when they came closer Optimus could see that all ornaments and decorative carvings were of them and their deeds as well.

"Skills... Those are overrated," The Fallen chuckled. He seemed to be very subtly excited about something, and Optimus dreaded what they would find inside the stadium. "I will give you knowledge."

Thousands upon thousands of people were gathering to the stadium to see something. The Fallen led Optimus there as well, but as the spectators took the stairs up, he took Optimus down below into the filthy, dark tunnels.

"You still have not told me what I am about to face. What great evil there is?" Optimus said as they felt their way to somewhere by following the wall, only the touch guiding them in the dark maze.

The Fallen laughed again, the noise echoing in the tunnel. "This amuses me greatly! You are about

to meet your match, Optimus Prime, in more than one meaning of the phrase! No matter how long ago it was and how much you have worked on forgetting it, nothing escapes fate, and the one your spark once yearned for and never stopped is about to unload some karma!”

Optimus felt cold all over. He had a depressingly likely answer to the question who The Fallen was talking about, and he wondered if anything would ever be enough to solve the tangle he and Megatron had made. He wished they would have never met at all.

“I am no stranger to doomed affections,” The Fallen said. The tunnel started to climb upward and at the end there was light. The noise of the audience echoed in the tunnel. “It didn’t end right last time, so you are to take another chance. I am about to make sure you know exactly who you are dealing with. You need to see the real version of your beloved, little Prime, so take a good, long look!”

The Fallen grabbed Optimus by the shoulder guard and pushed him towards the heavy gate sealing the end of the tunnel. Optimus took support from the bars and looked at the arena covered in white sand. The crowd was roaring and stomping on the floor where they sat, and on the sands was the target of their attention. Eight gladiators were in the middle of a spectacle of one against seven opponents. All bots were big and savage-looking, wearing heavy armor but only what each had managed to gather and there were plenty of weak spots. They were armed with only basic weapons such as swords, spears and knives, and in process of tearing each other into pieces.

The gladiator in the middle, who was the one defending himself against a team of seven, looked familiar. When he took a hold of an opponent, who had foolishly charged him and used only his servos and claws to wrench and twist the mech’s helm off, he let out a thundering battle cry, and Optimus recognized him as Megatron.

The gladiator roared and yanked his servos high in the air, the dented helm in his hold spurting out energon and its severed cables spitting sparks as Megatron showed off his prize to the cheering crowd.

The remaining six challengers didn’t let the show go on for long, but launched a new assault to him. Megatron tossed the decapitated helm at them and charged to meet them with his sword held high.

They collided with a grotesque crash of crunching metal and splattering energon as Megatron tore right through the first two mechs, sending several severed limbs twisted beyond recognition flying. Those still holding their weapons managed to get closer and deliver blows with their daggers and swords, but it looked like the collision hadn’t been so random as it had seemed. Megatron had efficiently chopped off the arms and servos holding spears, leaving his challengers with only close range weapons.

But despite his tactical move he suffered some damage, as he hadn’t been able to dodge all the blades. When the challengers sprang back to regroup, Optimus saw the streams of energon running down Megatron’s chassis and left leg, the white sand darkening in contact and sticking to his plating. One dagger was still jutting out of his side.

Megatron kept his sword in a defensive position in front of him as he and the challenging gladiators circled each other, the ring between them now muddy with energon, circuit boards and pieces of machinery scattered around. Megatron inspected the dagger wound with several quick looks and servo-feel before promptly grabbing it and yanking the blade out.

The audience seemed to appreciate the display of brutality and a tide of cheers went through it. Megatron tossed the dagger into the sand and laughed.

The mechs charged again. Metal clashed as heavy swords collided, attack after attack was blocked

and directed aside by both sides, fists and pedes reached to deliver blows in between the stinging weapons. Megatron lifted his heavy pede and aimed a sideways kick into a challenger's helm, but the nimble bot rolled out of the way and the kick hit his comrade, who wasn't so lucky. The kick threw him down, a large dent in his chassis clearly visible and gushing energon through the cracks.

Megatron's kicking pede thumped on the ground and he pushed with the other, keeping the movement going, and took a leap towards the mech lying vulnerable on the ground. Megatron raised his sword above his helm and turned the blade downward, bringing it down on his opponent with the entirety of his weight. The large sword rammed through the mech's faceplate, putting a hole where his expression of wondering terror had been, and Megatron followed, crushing his chassis under his knees.

The others put some distance between themselves, the reigning champion and his fresh kill that still twitched and convulsed on the ground. Megatron rose back on his pedes, the front of his chassis and the lower half of his faceplate glowing wet, radiant blue as he let out a roar of victory to the audience celebrating the slaughter he had delivered with thunderous applause and chants of his name.

Optimus leaned against the heavy bars, unable to do anything else but to witness the match. The gladiatorial fights had a long tradition in Cybertronian history and in many of their cultures, but Optimus had only ever witnessed a few fights during his life cycle. He had visited a back-alley Pit with Jazz twice in Iacon, but those battles were nothing compared to the Pits of Kaon and the couple of matches Megatron had invited him to in order to show him the true colours of the culture of his caste.

That had been much like the celebrated carnage unfolding before him now, except Megatron hadn't invited him here and certainly wasn't trying to prove anything to him now. The gladiator was simply enjoying himself.

"Enjoying the show?" The Fallen asked, clearly pleased with himself.

Remembering the Prime whose illusion this was, Optimus shook himself awake from his trance. "What is the point of all this? Are you going to make me fight him in the arena?"

"No, no, no such thing," The Fallen assured him with a chuckle. "I promised you knowledge, didn't I? Now take a good, long look at that beast of a mech and know you are looking at the true form of Megatron of Kaon. No speeches, no glorious cause, no warrior's honor or any of those silly things he hides behind, just the lust for battle and the joy of tearing a bot in half. Watch him embrace his true function, the mindless killing machine he is!"

The words hit Optimus like a blow but he kept his cool composure. The last thing he wanted was to show weakness to the disgraced Prime, and so he fought to keep himself grounded. After all this was nothing new: He had known about Megatron's past, in fact he had willingly showed it to him, and Optimus wasn't the type of a bot who lied to themselves and smoothed out the wrinkles of reality.

"You felt sorry for the scum of Kaon, didn't you?" The Fallen said. "You pitied their poverty and harsh life, you wanted to help them and make them happy and clean, just like the people in your own cozy home city. You even felt sorry for him, whether you like to admit it or not. You pitied him for having to fight for his survival and killing for the amusement of others. But look at him now. Do you pity him now? Look how much he enjoys it!"

Optimus didn't say anything but simply supported himself on the bars and watched another poor gladiator Megatron had managed to pry away from his comrades meet his fate. Megatron cleaved



off the mech's arm that was still clutching the sword, then dropped his own blade and started to tear him into pieces with his bare servos. After a while Optimus couldn't bear to watch any more, so he turned to look The Fallen instead. "You didn't tell me what the point of this is!"

The Fallen huffed a laugh through his dark smirk. "The truth is the point, little Prime. I want you to look at him, the real him and not turn away. Your spark has been secretly wistful all these stellar cycles. Let's see if it still is when I'm through with you."

Optimus mumbled grimly to himself as he watched the violent spectacle unfold in the arena. Megatron was expressing his showmanship that would be present in many of his stunts later, discarded his sword for now and picked up one of the spears. He shook the severed servo still clutching the weapon's shaft and wielded it with light and sure movements, just as expertly as he had done with the sword, and started to hunt the remaining challengers like little beasts in the wild.

"Do you think this is worth of all your boasting before?" Optimus asked suddenly.

The Fallen didn't seem offended or doubting his upper standing at all when he replied: "What ever do you mean?"

"I already know Megatron was a gladiator, even that he was one by choice," Optimus said as he watched Megatron striking through a mech's defenses and spearing him right through the spark. "You are not telling me anything I don't already know. So what is your point?"

The Fallen laughed. "There's the cold confidence of a true Prime, youngling! I can see how you survived through the war. But don't get impatient with me now, this is only the part where you look at the truth, you have yet to experience the truth and then to do something about it. You just wait, I'll carve that sickening affection out of you."

"I can see the confidence in you as well," Optimus dryly replied and turned back to the match that was nearing its cruel end.

"I think I misspoke. I won't, but he certainly will," The Fallen darkly added and joined the applause of the crowd when Megatron finished off the last of his opponent by feeding the spear to him and jamming it through his entire frame, turning him into a fountain of spurting energon.

The old Kaon faded into swirling mist and red stardust before Optimus' optics just when Megatron began his gloating tour around the arena. The Fallen had apparently decided that he had seen enough and now it was time to move on.

A new scenario was taking shape before him, and it was vibrant red.

The magnificent old Kaon gave way to a Kaon in far future, and this one was full of fire and ruin. Optimus recognized a battlefield in a sparkbeat and assessed the situation like the hardened soldier he was. The tall buildings had suffered some damage in bombings, and the streets were full of rubble, some of it being from previous air raids since it was swept into piles, but fresh rubble was raining down as well. There were several groups of soldier on the streets, all seeking as much cover as they could in a city, and around them everything glowed red. There were fires everywhere, on buildings just like on people and their vehicles. Everything looked red and orange and the dark buildings cast long shimmering shadows in the torturing heat.

There was red street and sand under Optimus' pedes, and before he could take one step in any direction something blunt hit him in the back of the helm with strength that made him lose his footing. He fell on his knees in the sand and broken tiles, a ringing in his helm and a wave after wave of nauseating pain washing over him so he had to fight to keep his tanks from purging and

couldn't even think of getting up.

Something hot pressed against the back of his helm, and the sound of a blaster cycling up filled Optimus' audio feed.

“Lord Megatron! The enemy is defeated! The Autobot assault to our capital has been stopped!” declared the voice of a bot holding a blaster to his helm, and after a few confused clicks he recognized the voice as that of The Fallen.

He didn't have the time to question his choice of taking an active part in his lesson before another voice spoke, a far more familiar one: “Excellent, soldier! Decepticons! We have victory! The Prime has been captured!”

It was the hoarse and heated roar of Megatron, and as Optimus struggled to adjust his sensors after the heavy blow he managed to take a look at the gladiator. The Megatron who stood before him was a terrifying and familiar sight: He was covered in energon of the enemy as well as the sand, dust and dirt from the battle, and black spots of smoke covered his raw metal plating all over, but his red optics shone like hot coals from his blackened face, as did his sharp grin. He was full of life and energy, the thirst for battle raging on like a fire that radiated through the seams of his armor, heating up his massive lifefluid-soaked frame that steamed like a gutted husk in cold.

Optimus tried to stand up and face the Decepticon warlord, but noticed he was tied down. He turned his helm left and right and saw he had been wrapped in chains and shackled, and several big enemy soldiers were holding the ends of his ties and keeping him still and steady.

As he noticed the chains, another wave of pain flashed through him, and not just through his helm but his entire frame; he was beaten, full of dents and cuts and burns, the blade of his arm shattered and his energon almost entirely exhausted in ammo of the ion blaster. He was weak and in pain, looking up to Megatron, who had unnatural fire in his optics.

“Finally,” the warlord sneered. “Finally, the traitor brother of mine is defeated! Rejoice, Decepticons! The Supreme Commander of the enemy is in our custody!”

A wave of cheering went through the soldiers, and by the sheer amount of sound Optimus registered he could tell they were surrounded by an entire army.

Megatron let his victorious gaze circle his troops before turning it back to Optimus. He leaned down so he could lower his voice and speak directly to his faceplate: “But not for long, Prime. Today is the day I shall extinguish your spark! I warned you what happens to those who leave my side after making promises.”

“I did what was right,” Optimus answered without thinking much of it. He heard The Fallen chuckle behind him.

Megatron sneered at him. “The Prime is so very certain he is the goodness and purity of all that exists!” he loudly said, and the soldiers around them laughed and mocked. Someone threw a rock at Optimus, and even though the aim was poor and it missed, the gesture was clear.

Megatron continued with a lower voice again: “So certain that you are willing to ignore the voices of half of the entire population! Are we too dirty and uneducated to have our cries heard, hm? I was the leader they demanded, not some insignificant little librarian!”

“Civilized decisions in politics are not made by yelling the loudest,” Optimus said and fully expected Megatron to strike him, but the warlord simply laughed.

“Aren't they? Look where we are now,” he whispered softly. “And you will learn your place, librarian! You will learn what will happen to bots who betray and deny me! You will learn how a true Kaonian way demands to end affairs like ours! You will learn, and I shall teach.”

“Nothing you say will interest me, and nothing you say or do will change the truth,” Optimus said with calmness he had honed during the eons of battle and suffering. The Decepticons close enough to hear him laughed.

As did Megatron, whose predatory grin was clearly amused. “Oh, who said anything about teaching with words? I am not about to march you into dusty archives and read you Kaonian history!”

More laughter followed.

“Oh no, Optimus,” Megatron chuckled with dark intention, settling his servos on his hipplate and peering down at the other. “I prefer a more servos-on approach.”

Optimus' thoughts darted to this way and another, wildly speculating what sickening things The Fallen was about to pile on him now, when Megatron gestured to the Decepticons behind him and issued a command: “Bring forth the prisoners!”

Whatever horror pictures Optimus' mind had presented to him in the last few klikcycles they were nothing compared to this. This extended beyond himself and there was nothing he could do to stop it from happening, right before his optics. The soldiers returned with their comrades, and along with them they were dragging Optimus' team members, all as chained and bound and helpless as he was. Decepticons laughed, mocked and spat at them, and Megatron admired the show but couldn't keep his optics away from Optimus for long, greedily drinking in the despair on his face.

“The more the merrier goes the saying, doesn't it?” Megatron chuckled to him. Optimus couldn't find his voice.

Megatron didn't let that bother him, but promptly walked over to the Autobot nearest to him. He gathered the chains from his soldiers in one servo and dragged Ultra Magnus in front of Optimus, leaving a trail of energon leakage behind.

The Autobot lieutenant was at the surface as calm as ever, but bitter regret threatened to break through that. “Sir,” Ultra Magnus managed to force out of his vocalizer despite his extensive injuries, “I tried -”

Megatron's fusion cannon pressed against Ultra Magnus' helm, cycled up turning the purple into a bright white flame, then fired. For a moment it was raining blackened little pieces of metal, circuit boards and energon, and Ultra Magnus' frame convulsed like a stranded fishbot before falling limp on the sand.

Decepticons cheered and clapped much like the audience of the Pits. Optimus was still staring at the spot where Ultra Magnus' apologetic optics had been mere klicks ago.

Megatron chuckled quietly and gave his fusion cannon a pat.

“Bring me another Autobot scum!” he ordered, and the soldiers yanked forth the next one in line while another bunch of soldiers dragged Ultra Magnus' remains away.

“Go ahead! Shoot away, Buckethead!” Bulkhead barked while staring straight in Megatron's face. The Wrecker was ever defiant even without any of his blasters or either of his legs, but when he turned to Optimus his gaze turned soft and sad. “Just look away, Optimus.”

The fusion cannon went off.

Optimus couldn't stop staring. He struggled against his chains again, but his frame was too weak and it trembled. He was held fast, there was no escape, and he couldn't bring himself to turn away his gaze. His horrified, grief-stricken mind was convinced that it was his duty to watch, to at least bear witness if he couldn't save his family.

Next one thrust to the ground was Wheeljack who spat curses and insults to the very end while pointedly avoiding Optimus' gaze, and then he was gone in one flash from Megatron's fusion cannon. No goodbyes, no words of comfort, just a clean shot to the helm and the terrible noise of metal exploding open from the inside, a processor shattering and energon squirting in every direction.

Optimus felt a warm trail on his faceplate and wasn't sure if it was energon or coolant.

Six Decepticons tore Smokescreen away from Bumblebee and dragged the youngest to Megatron's pedes.

“Ah, the latest addition to your team,” Megatron sighed, cruelly gentle as his gaze darted between Smokescreen and Optimus, unable to decide whose torment he enjoyed the most. “Shall we oblige him with a slightly more traditional parting?”

Optimus couldn't utter a word. His mind was blank and couldn't come up with anything to say to the warlord that wasn't a desperate cry or a blunt insult, but fully aware that both of those would amount to nothing at all. So he turned to Smokescreen instead, taking in his ruined paint, multiple leaking stab wounds and the coolant-stained faceplate.

“Optimus!” Smokescreen cried out, trying to reach for him, but he was too tangled in the chains, and his left arm hung limp by his side, unresponsive.

“Calm yourself, Smokescreen. It will be alright, any moment now. Be calm and it'll be alright,” Optimus heard himself say, promising things he knew weren't true. But Smokescreen nodded, optics offline and his lipplates squeezed into a trembling line.

Megatron watched and listened with an eager grin before he switched weapons like he had promised. The fusion cannon cycled down and went dark, and instead the sword manifested itself from his armor plating.

“Yes, listen to your sweet Commander,” Megatron mocked as he took a hold of Smokescreen's helm, pulling him up to stand on his knees and pressed his helm back, exposing his neckcabling. “He's right. It's going to be over very soon.”

And with one sure and precise slash of the blade, it was.

Optimus swallowed down a cry and yet again yanked at his bindings, still in vain. There was no way out.

Megatron tossed the severed helm to his soldiers like this was just a spectacle to him, and maybe it was. There was nothing different between this and the spectacle in the Pits like Optimus had just witnessed, this was only a show, just like everything else. Everyone was simultaneously acting and struggling.

The thought was followed by a mental reminder crying that this wasn't real, this was only a dream image, a test for a Prime. Optimus clung to the thought, cherished it and tried to bend his mind to make it real, but dream or not he was trapped in it and would have to see it through.

Bumblebee was tossed on the ground next to Smokescreen's decapitated husk. He didn't struggle, barely moved at all. He was almost apathetic and shivered more violently than ever in any kind of cold, his helm hanging and optics unfocused. As Megatron yanked his helm back and raised the sword, a few quiet beeps left his vocalizer: "Goodbye."

The sword swung down.

The two young mechs were dragged away together and tossed into the growing pile of husks that a few scavengers were already poking at in hopes of easy spare parts. Optimus didn't know where to focus his optics, it seemed that each place was worse than the one before. The burning city around them radiated its pressuring heat and made his cooling fans howl, and the light of the fires reflected in pure orange from the few clean spots of Megatron's armor.

Arcee was tossed down before him, still kicking and struggling under the heavy chains her frame was wrapped in. There was no fear in the optics of the femme, just pure fury as she spat and kicked red sand towards Megatron who just laughed.

"Optimus! Fight until the end! Never give up!" Arcee yelled just before Megatron's blade cut down and sliced open her throat, making her helm tip back and hang there by the spinal strut.

"I wish my second in command were as feisty as yours was," Megatron chuckled as Arcee was dragged away. "But on a second thought, my second is still functioning!"

The crowd roared with laughter as if he had made an incredibly witty joke, but this time Megatron didn't turn to bask in the favor of his followers. This time he kept his optics on Optimus' face, mesmerized by the anguish written all over it and smirking. "Only one remains, Optimus. Your dutiful little healer," he almost cooed. "In the Pits the most meaningful kill is always saved for the last. First you get rid of the little vermin and only then move up to the real slaughter that would please the crowd the most." he leaned closer, lowering his voice. "I must admit I'll enjoy this one the most as well. That is, at least until I get to you."

It took eight Decepticons to control Ratchet, who was not cooperating. The medic struggled in his bonds and tried as much to grab a hold on the ground with the remains of his blades as to cut the ankles of the soldiers dragging him along. One whom he had managed to cut kicked him when they dumped him before Megatron.

"Ah, so nice of you to join as, doctor," Megatron said while he shook his sword in order to get some of the energon off it.

"Get scrapped, Megatron!" Ratchet snapped at him.

"Ratchet..." Optimus breathed, pulling at his chains to get a bit closer to his friend. He didn't know was he trying to comfort him or seek comfort for himself, but it didn't matter.

Ratchet turned to look at him, but the burning blaze of his optics didn't change in tone. "And you!" he snapped, making Optimus flinch. "You got us into this mess! This is your fault, and yours alone! Think about the young mechs! They didn't have to die like this! You started this with your egotistical little rebellion with that madmech!"

The chant of *this is not real, this is just a vision* didn't protect Optimus from the pain Ratchet's words inflicted upon him. They bypassed his armor and got straight to his spark that tried to shrink into itself and become nothing, and Optimus turned his helm away in a manner he hadn't done since he was a young archivist being told off.

"You brought down Cybertron, Optimus!" Ratchet yelled, his voice breaking. "You didn't pound

Megatron into scrap when you had the chance! Many chances in fact! You care about him more than you care about our future! Now be a true Prime and finish him off!"

Megatron's fusion cannon went off and Ratchet fell silent. "That is quite enough, doctor," Megatron said languidly. "Toss the noisy little vermin into the pile with the rest!" he ordered the soldiers who got right to work.

The Fallen, who had been silent for the entire time the scene unfolded, leaned down and talked right into Optimus' audio receptor: "This is the experience of the truth I was talking about. It's not just a flick of my unique imagination but the truth and nothing but the truth. But I don't have to tell that to you, do I? You already know."

Optimus was cycling air through his vents in heavy gulps, forcibly keeping the vents long and deep. Ratchet's words were still echoing in his mind, and illusion or not he couldn't bring himself to look at the pile of husks that had leaked a large puddle of energon underneath them. The shackles on his wrists had dug through the plating and were dripping energon to the red sand.

The Fallen kept talking: "You should actually do as your doctor friend said. Straighten your back, stop sniveling and finish him off."

Optimus thought about it like he had a million times before. He tried to contemplate killing Megatron, and after witnessing such a sadistic carnage it shouldn't be hard. It might even make him feel better, give him the comfort he had searched for in his family that was now permanently taken away from him.

Optimus forced his frame to do as he wanted it to. He shook his helm. "No, I won't," he forced out, his voice barely a whisper. "I won't do that. I can't do the same, I must end this. I can't just... I can't just drown in it."

The Fallen scoffed for the first time with real annoyance. "You weak idiot!" he spat.

"Yes," Optimus replied. "Always weak over strength like this."

"Spoken like Prima himself," The Fallen said coldly and with a note that sounded like bitterness. For the first time he didn't seem to purely enjoy the test. "Very well then. Let's move on with that thought. Next I'll show you the fate of those who refuse to carry their responsibilities to the end."

The vision started to melt away, the red sand flying away like taken by storm wind. The heat went away as did the reek of burning metal and energon. Optimus' chains remained however, and some new ones sneaked around and bound his frame even more tightly. His arms were secured against his sides and servos behind his back, pedes bound together and a thicker chain hooked his knees, midsection and servos to a collar around his neck and the collar to the floor.

A cool, dark room was slowly taking form around him. The room was not big but appeared that way due to the complete lack of any kind of furniture, and darkness made it look like there were no walls at all. He was chained in what he assumed was the middle of the room. Optimus tried to turn his frame around a bit to see what was behind him, but the chains made it impossible to move much.

"This is the world were you denied reality and rejected your responsibilities," The Fallen's dark voice spoke from somewhere behind Optimus, echoing in the empty room. Optimus expected him to explain the situation more, but The Fallen didn't speak again and by the lack of any sounds Optimus assumed he didn't move either, content only to watch.

What he expected to see, Optimus didn't know. The room remained dark, cool and quiet, and Optimus remained absolutely still in the middle of it. The silence and darkness made his sensors send an endless feed of frustrating nothingness to his processor that was soon working in overdrive trying to grasp something, anything, in the empty feed, and failing. Optimus felt it as tenseness and painful sensitivity, his tactile sensors being the only things sensing anything, and that was an echo of endless pain. In this vision he had most likely stayed trapped like this for many cycles already, so raw his knees felt and so stiff every joint was, all screaming in quiet agony that wasn't even sharp or electrifying, but slow and dull like a mass of suffocating slime that was slowly killing him with pressure.

Time went by and Optimus tested his chains again, pulling and twisting but without any result aside from making the cuffs dig deeper into his wiring: not a single creak or jingle could be heard, so perfectly adjusted his bindings were.

It couldn't be helped; he was stuck.

The silence was absolute, and after a while it started to feel judgmental, even mocking. Maybe he wasn't imprisoned after all, maybe he was simply left here, bound and helpless. If what The Fallen had said was true – and he didn't have a reason to suspect it wasn't – he had most likely been captured by the Decepticons, and he wouldn't put it above them to leave a bound prisoner to starve.

But it wasn't like Megatron to do this. They had always fought straight up and honest, facing each other in fair battles with all the weapons and strength they possessed. At least part of that had been about a gladiator's honor that Megatron still held close to spark, but Optimus had always thought it was about respect too. They had a score to settle, and even if Megatron didn't respect or care about anyone else, Optimus had been his archenemy, the one bot who got under his plating and would have to be defeated fair and square. That had been all that was left of the perfect connection they had felt when they had first met, and in a way Optimus had cherished that.

Megatron wouldn't just bind and abandon him in some narrow little hole in the ground.

Optimus' vents malfunctioned and took in too short and shallow intakes. He yanked his chains again and wished he could look up. Maybe Megatron had finally grown tired of their game and decided that a good way to get rid of Optimus Prime was to dig a well, put him in there and seal the lid. Maybe this was just about his slow and agonizing death, stuck and alone and forgotten, left behind like a piece of scrap –

The door opened and a shaft of light fell into the room. It was still a room, not a well, just a room, and someone was coming in.

A switch clicked and a light-bulb flickered on in the ceiling which was surprisingly low, and its brutal light seemed to pierce Optimus' unprepared optics. He blinked and adjusted the sensors furiously, managing to capture a blurry figure entering the room that was so much smaller than it had appeared in the darkness. The figure dragged something from the back wall, stopped in front of Optimus and sat down.

“Are we comfortable, Optimus?” asked a familiar voice in a tone that not only told the speaker knew exactly how uncomfortable he was but had put him in the position as well. Despite all this, hearing Megatron's voice drowned Optimus' spark in relief for a brief klik; he hadn't been left for death. He could cycle air again.

Optimus' optics finally found the right settings for the environment and the world came in focus. There was one piece of furniture in the room after all, a simple steel chair with a straight back that Megatron had retrieved for himself and was now sitting in. Megatron himself was studying

Optimus with cruel optics.

Optimus didn't say anything, but yanked his chains, making Megatron chuckle.

“Test all you like. Those are made out of titanium and even you can't just pull them apart. My special gift to you, if you will,” he explained with a sly smile.

Optimus decided to bypass the chit-chat and charge. “Why am I here?” he asked.

Megatron's smile dropped and was replaced with a cold look. “You have been defeated, Optimus no-longer-Prime. Cybertron is being born again with the help of her new Decepticon ruler now that the filth of the old has been disposed of. That means you as well. You are now my prisoner.”

“Why am I still online?” Optimus asked then.

Megatron's optics narrowed. “This again, Optimus? If you try to bite off your glossa again I'll have you gagged, don't think I won't.”

A suicide attempt gave light to the amount of time Optimus had spent imprisoned like this in the world of this vision, and he felt a cold wave rush through himself at that. He hadn't ever considered taking his own life. “No, I won't do that,” he said, trying his hardest to keep his voice steady despite the pain in his joints. “I'm asking why you haven't offlined me yet.”

The corner of Megatron's mouth tugged up in a half smile that looked rather painful. Optimus couldn't tell if Megatron was trying to repress the expression or was it just sour. “I do with you as I wish,” the warlord replied.

“And this is your wish?” Optimus pressed on, suspicious. “To keep me locked up in a small room for all eternity?”

“Not all eternity, my overly dramatic librarian friend,” Megatron scoffed, but didn't offer a correction either. “I'll offline you when I feel like it, but right now I'm just going to enjoy you, completely at my mercy.”

“It's been rather long, hasn't it, Megatron? Shouldn't you make up your mind already?” Optimus said, sensing a nerve to hit.

And he was right, Megatron bared his dentae at him and snapped: “Silence! Or I will have you gagged, librarian! I won't be mocked under my own roof!”

Optimus felt like he should have said something stinging back, but he was too taken aback by finding out he wasn't rusting away in some distant prison asteroid but apparently wherever the place Megatron called home nowadays was.

His silence pleased Megatron, whose snarl twisted into a smile again. “That's more like it,” he murmured and relaxed back in the chair. He leaned onto his knee with his elbow and tapped the side of his faceplate with his claws as he continued to feast his optics on his prisoner.

Optimus decided it was better to just observe and let Megatron take the situation where he wanted to, then maybe he could crack the meaning of this vision and get out of it. Now that the claustrophobic panic had faded Optimus remembered again he wasn't in fact imprisoned anywhere but in The Fallen's lesson, whatever that was. He wouldn't offline here, no matter how uncomfortable it got.

But the vision wasn't progressing in any direction since it started to look like Megatron was



perfectly content just staring at Optimus without uttering a word or doing anything. Klikcycles ticked by and nothing happened, and Optimus got a hunch that this was a regular occurrence.

“This is it, then?” Optimus snapped. “You're not going to make a decision of any kind, you're just going to stare?”

Megatron grunted something to himself. “I like you so much better when you don't talk,” he scoffed and sat at the edge of his chair. Now that his almost meditative observing had been interrupted his optics gained a new kind of a look, one hiding dark thoughts behind the glass of his optics.

A cold metallic sound that hurt Optimus' oversensitive audio receptors echoed in the room when Megatron's sword manifested from his right arm. He rested the blade on his lap and stroked the edge with his thumb, thoughtful.

“Maybe I should kill you,” he thought aloud, drinking in Optimus' helpless position. “Maybe I should walk over there and ram this right into your spark.”

He got up from his place and started to make his way over to Optimus, who subconsciously struggled against his bounds. While on his knees Optimus had to look up to Megatron much more than usually, and the perspective only added to Megatron's already intimidating posture.

When Megatron finally got in front of Optimus he got down to one knee to observe him more closely, like a predator using its nearly dead prey as a toy. He lifted the sword and pressed the very tip of it in the middle of Optimus' chassis. Optimus could feel his spark thrumming inside its chamber, and suspected Megatron felt the faint vibrations across his blade.

“Should I cut you open?” Megatron growled at him, tilting his helm. Optimus held his gaze and said nothing.

“Or...” Megatron continued, lifting his other servo and reaching out to touch Optimus with it, “should I slit your throat?” His large palm pressed against the other mech's neck, almost gentle as the digits wrapped around the cabling, pushing his helm back. He raised the sword and for a brief moment Optimus saw his own reflection on its flat side before Megatron forced his helm further back, exposing the length of his neck.

Optimus stared at the ceiling, the fiercely white light making his optics blurry and the feed pixelated, and couldn't stop a shiver when cold steel pressed against the thick cabling of his neck. His sensor-deprived frame latched on to the sensation and welcomed it with such relief and joy it neared pleasure.

“I should slice your throat and bathe in your energon. It would be the right thing to do,” Megatron said, his voice barely even a whisper and hoarse with something Optimus hadn't heard in his voice before.

On that moment Optimus focused only on Megatron's voice to ground himself in the flood of sensory information. The servo on his neck and the cold, sharp metal were paving the way for other sensations his frame was drinking in and turning into a meteor shower inside his processor: Megatron's frame radiated its natural warmth that caressed his front in the chilly air of the room, his touch was almost like a caress just because it didn't crush or tear anything, and the deep rumble of his voice pierced Optimus' being and resonated in every single part of his frame.

Megatron didn't move and had apparently ran out of things to say now that he had walked himself to this point. Optimus waited for something to happen while internally struggling with sensations.

He noticed his vents had started to work harder, gulping in more air than before while his frame trembled with a strain this new arched pose pushed upon in.

Optimus clenched his dentae together but a single grunt escaped.

“Are you afraid, Optimus?” Megatron asked in a whisper, breathing it straight into Optimus' audio receptor. The puff of air felt like a kiss. “What do you think I should do?”

Optimus' frame was at its limit, his joints would lock up and his hydraulics violently reboot if he couldn't relax and shift soon. “Get away from me you monster,” he groaned.

To his great surprise Megatron did. He yanked his servo and sword away, took several steps back and growled with anger.

Optimus slumped down as far as he could, hanging limply in his bounds and tried to make his frame resume the regular functions. After a few deep invents his gaze started to search for Megatron who was clearly furious and pacing before him.

“I have you know this is all your fault, Optimus!” Megatron snapped, pointing a digit at him. When Optimus didn't reply, he grabbed the chair, dragged it back to its place and slammed it against the wall before stomping back in Optimus' field of vision.

“You don't deserve an easy death! As far as I'm concerned you could just stay here and starve! I don't care!” he snarled down at his prisoner, then marched to the door, turned the switch and slammed the heavy door shut behind him. Optimus heard a lock click, and then he was alone in the cold, dark silence again.

He was left alone with his thoughts while his frame slowly came down from the burst of intoxicating sensations that burned down to something akin to shame.

“That was interesting, now wasn't it?” The Fallen chuckled as he slowly made his way to Optimus' field of vision, the rune carvings shedding their own looming light in the darkness.

Optimus had completely forgotten about him, and now realized he had not only witnessed the entire incident but orchestrated it to teach Optimus – what? He still didn't know what The Fallen's angle was.

Now with embarrassment, shame and physical pain burning his frame Optimus started to strongly suspect this held no purpose other than torment.

“What is the meaning of this?” Optimus demanded once again. The scene was over but The Fallen didn't seem to be in any hurry setting him free from the chains.

The Fallen snickered and walked right before Optimus, kneeling down there. The purple light from the carvings on his plating was somehow sickly and cast unsettling shadows on his faceplate, showing Optimus a reflection of the terrifying agent of destruction he had been in life.

“Blaming me for your own torment now, Optimus?” The Fallen asked, clicking his glossa. “That doesn't fit the impression I've gathered of you! Usually you take the responsibility for your own choices and actions instead of blaming them on others.”

“This is but a vision, Fallen! Everything here is up to you,” Optimus argued back even though the observation hit home and wounded him.

“But that's where you are wrong, little Prime,” The Fallen replied. “In the vision I showed you before, you refused to take action and kill him. You let him win, and this is what he would do with that. You give him mercy and this is how he repays you, that is the inevitable consequence of your

choice to play the saint, and now you will face that! Or did you expect something else from the great warlord, the leader of the Decepticons and the undefeated champion of the Pits of Kaon?"

"He has honor," Optimus answered. He wasn't certain of the truth value of his claim, but he had to say something. He couldn't fall mute before The Fallen and let him burden him with these twisted illusions, he had some pride too.

"He also has a special optic for you," The Fallen remarked as if reminding Optimus. "And this is how it would manifest itself. You may fantasize about a fair battle and him allowing you to keep your dignity when he strikes you down, but he isn't like that. He isn't the mech you think he is. He is like me."

Optimus clenched his servos into fists to suppress a surge of anger those words awoke in him. He couldn't even put a digit on what he was insulted by and for whom he felt that.

The Fallen smirked at his silence and had a flash in his optics like he could see the storm of emotions in Optimus' mind.

"Don't misunderstand me, little Prime, you are special to him," The Fallen said, softer now but no less malicious. "It is just that this is how he would show that, not in a way you'd want him to, not the way you dream about, but like this. You as his pet that he might adore but that does nothing more than remind him of all his short-comings, of weakness, and everything he is ashamed of."

The Fallen's words were full of implications, presumptions and guesses, but also a shred of truth Optimus couldn't help seeing, like he was looking into a mirror.

"Dream as you might, you don't get to make choices about what others are like, and you don't get to erase their darkness," The Fallen said through a grin.

Optimus stared into The Fallen's optics, steeling himself against that forceful stare no matter how much he wanted to avert his gaze. "So be it, then. I still won't kill him," he said back.

A dark shadow seemed to hit The Fallen's faceplate, darkening his optics and making his faceplate look uncannily dented. "Very well then, keep lying. But termination is not foreign to you. You have seen death," he answered with the same ominously soft tone as before.

The dark room started to dissolve into stardust fields again, and white light fell over them. Dark swirls of smoky clouds and cosmic material started to take new forms again according to The Fallen's command. The old Prime stood up and took a few steps to the side as the new vision molded into being.

The light that had first looked white took a new shade and turned blue. Beautiful, shimmering blue that was softer than any electricity and bright like the stars surrounded them and instead of suffocating air of a sealed room there was soothing coolness. This place was outside and Optimus could see the arch of black starry sky above that wiped away the last traces of claustrophobic stress the previous vision had sparked in him.

Then the chains vanished and he fell. There was nothing underneath him, just a long free fall into nothingness, and on an instinct his servos flew up to scramble for something to hold on to. He caught an edge on the dark metal wall before him and hung there, staring up to the restlessly dwelling light of cybermatter.

On that moment he realized where he was. This wasn't just a vision. This was a memory.

The Omega Lock hummed with power, sending shimmers through the entire hull of the Nemesis.

Optimus felt the ache of fresh battle wounds as he hung above Earth that shone its calming blue light, but before that would be the atmosphere. They were still well within the planet's gravitational pull and the fall would be fatal.

But Optimus wasn't thinking about that. He was staring up to the edge of the deck where Megatron was standing, the Dark Starsaber in servo and victorious gleam in his optics.

The time seemed to slow down as Optimus' frame waited for the killing blow, but Optimus' mind feared for what he knew was about to come, his optics blown wide and fixated on their target regardless of how much he wished this wouldn't happen.

The Fallen, visible only to Optimus, was standing a few steps aside and glancing between Optimus and Megatron, a hint of a smirk on his features.

“No! Not this!” Optimus shouted up to The Fallen. His words didn't change the scene unfolding before him in the slightest. “I don't want to see this! Not again!”

The Fallen chuckled and threw a look behind Megatron, then looked down at Optimus. “Too bad.”

“Prepare to join your scout in the Allspark!” Megatron yelled in too early triumph as he turned the blade downwards, its tainted purple illuminating his cruel features and filling Optimus' tanks with nausea. He couldn't move, he couldn't do anything.

“Megatron!” shouted a voice Optimus hadn't heard in a long, long time before this moment.

A questioning look passed Megatron's faceplate and he turned around, just in time for the Starsaber to pierce the very middle of his chassis. Optimus could almost hear the sharp noise of metal being pierced, his own blade spearing Megatron's thick armor like a needle goes through tinfoil.

A groan emerged from Megatron's vocalizer before his vents started wheezing. He swayed on his place, probably trying to realize what had happened. Down below Optimus was doing the same, a part of his mind numb with shock and some of it experiencing the most painful *déjà vu* of his existence.

“You took my voice. You will never rob anyone of anything ever again,” the new voice from the other end of the Starsaber swore.

*How ironic*, Optimus thought as his spark wriggled and squirmed like a pierced scraplet in its death throes, *how I am the one being robbed of something now*.

He felt a sting in the coolant tubes behind his optics, but the void stopped the tears from falling.

Megatron raised the Dark Starsaber one more time, but his grip of it slipped and the blade fell off the ship, falling past Optimus and towards the planet below. Megatron slumped down to one knee with a heavy crash, grasping the edge of the sword sunken into his chassis. Kliks stretched longer and longer and Optimus felt his own frame growing cold, then he heard a sound that he had heard thousands of times before but this time sealed itself into his memory forever: the low whine of a mech shutting down and falling offline.

Megatron's frame tipped backwards, slipping off the sword and falling back until it fell off the deck's edge. Optimus couldn't turn away or blink as his greatest enemy's husk fell down, and for the briefest moment he saw two hopelessly dark optics of a fallen gladiator on his way down. He couldn't tear his gaze away even after that, but turned his helm to look how Megatron fell, plummeting towards the strange world below them, his frame becoming smaller and smaller as the distance grew between them until finally it reached the atmosphere and lit up.

He stared as the flame grew brighter and smaller until the husk had nothing in it to burn up anymore. A small black spot falling towards the depths of an ocean was all that was left now. Optimus felt nothing but crippling grief.

When he turned his overtly heavy frame back to the ship and looked up, instead of Bumblebee it was The Fallen who greeted him, and he was smirking down at him.

“Remember this?” he needlessly asked. “Would that be so hard?”

Coolant welled in Optimus' optics but couldn't roll down. “No more,” he choked out, “not this. Please, not this!”

“What did I say about the inevitable?” The Fallen softly reminded him. “Let's try again, shall we?”

The vision fell apart again and immediately sprang to take a new form. The dream image of Nemesis disappeared and Optimus fell a short way to the soft surface of a stardust field. His pedes gave out under him and he dropped down on to his knees. The calming blue shimmer was drowned in thick black smoke.

The smoke covered everything from the ground to the sky until not a single twinkle of starlight got through it, and then fire emerged from its midsts. An air siren went off in the distance, and its wailing was accompanied by blaster shots, cannon fire and bombs, all coming closer as the smoke got thicker until it appeared almost like a solid wall.

Then the curtain swept aside and Optimus saw yet another battlefield full of black suffocating smoke, red fire and bright flashes of photon blasts. The city around him was in ruins, fire licking up and down buildings that were grumbling apart, their metal structures melting in the heat. The streets and plateaus were full of sand, rubble and makeshift barricades, units of soldiers of both sides were running around, all trying to keep moving and not get caught in enemy fire. The sky was black and everything below red.

“Oh, would you look at that,” The Fallen chuckled behind Optimus, “we're back here again!”

Optimus wasn't certain where exactly they were: The battle had mangled the city beyond recognition, and Optimus couldn't even be sure that this city was on Cybertron if not for the troops of bots scattered around.

The Fallen leaned over to him, whispering to the younger Prime's kneeling form: “You better get going. After all, remember what happened to your team last time we were here?”

Optimus felt cold and hot at the same time as a vision of watching his family being mercilessly executed flashed before his optics, and he stirred. He had to stop it, had to make it right, so he forced his pedes to support his weight and started to advance.

It was easy to slip back into the mindset of a soldier, especially with as lively a simulation as this was. Micronus Prime's exercises had been purely technical and hadn't allowed him to forget for a single moment it was only a simulation, but here, surrounded by chaos, fire and cries of the wounded, all his survival protocols online without further prompting.

“Don't forget your new weapon,” The Fallen said, and Optimus felt something materialize in his servo. He looked down and saw the cruelly gleaming blade of the Decepticon Hunter, an electric aura dancing around the blade and the servo holding it.

Optimus didn't bother to say anything to The Fallen but sprang forth. He already knew standing still in fire was a certain way to perish, and right now he needed to pinpoint his position on the

battlefield and find both his own troops and the enemy.

A party of five seekers flew above him, drooping low to drop bombs and the scooping up again. Optimus felt an alarmed shiver creeping down his spinal strut as he kept running, hoping the bombs would miss him as they started to rain down all around him. Sand and rock flew, and the explosions covered all other noises underneath them. Optimus lifted his gaze just in time to see the seekers getting caught in anti-aircraft fire, one of them taking critical hit and falling down as a fiery ball of maimed metal.

Optimus dived between tall buildings and made his way along a street full of abandoned shooting pits, husks and one destroyed tank that still pushed smoke out of its engines. Optimus stayed near a wall hoping he was invisible from the sky and wouldn't have the seekers returning and collapsing a building on him. He jumped over sandbags and wildly glanced around in case of snipers or traps, but didn't run into any.

Beyond the block was a the town square and Optimus stopped by the corner. Before him opened a view of a fierce battle, Autobots and Decepticons fighting servo-to-servo, using mostly blades and blunt objects of all kind, tearing and smashing their way through the enemy.

The square itself was almost completely open but forming several levels, built of multiple round platforms that rose towards the middle like a giant staircase. Once it had had a stone garden on it, but not anymore, now it was red sand and stone and energonblue.

“Optimus Prime!” roared a voice that carried over the clashing, tearing and crying.

Optimus followed the voice to the highest platform and saw no other than Megatron waiting for him, the Dark Starsaber in servo.

“Come and face me, Prime! This is our last stand!” Megatron roared over the chaotic crowd beneath his pedes.

Optimus stepped out of the shadow of the building and started to cross the space between him and his oldest enemy.

Megatron did the same, and the crowd gave way as he stepped down from the top level to the next, and when Optimus came closer the bots did the same for him. The leaking, dying masses parted as he and Megatron walked towards each other, ready to settle this once and for all.

When Optimus stepped on the first platform the crowd around him changed. The red light shed by the burning city made the shadows so black it felt possible to disappear in them, and the wallowing mass of soldiers seemed to blend together in them. The howls and cries of rage and pain formed one terrible storm of noise that drummed against his audio sensors, but he knew he couldn't stop or retreat now.

Stepping up on the next platform the heat seemed to spike up. All moisture on Optimus' plating turned to steam, and the air was so dry it was painful to vent. He kept his optics focused on Megatron who had walked across one platform and taken a step down towards him, the tainted light of the Dark Starsaber lighting his way. Shadows grew deeper around him and the light of his weapon.

On the next step the cries of the battling masses seemed to turn a notch towards desperation. Voices were shrieking and broken, crying and wailing and screaming, accompanied by the sounds of tearing metal, clashing blades and the deep drumming of warhammers and maces.

Optimus dared to steal a glance at his surroundings when he took the next step. The shadows were

black like nothingness, only the splattered energon reflecting light. The crowd of soldiers seemed to truly have melted together at the shadows as if welded by a torch, turning them into one terrible creature with hundreds of limbs and hundreds of mouths. The creature was so hungry it tore into its own frame with half of its mouths while other mouths cried out of agony.

The heat and the monstrosity around Optimus made his helm spin. He felt feverish and exhausted, and just one clear thought pierced through the haze in his mind: he had to keep his focus on Megatron. If he lost his target he would misstep, fall down, and become a part of the mass.

Finally they reached the same platform. Megatron swung the Dark Starsaber around in his servo as if the great blade weighted nothing, gazing at Optimus arrogantly.

“Great Optimus Prime!” he roared in greeting, “one shall stand!”

“And one shall fall!” Optimus finished and heard his own voice carry out like Megatron's.

The deformed creature all around them was beginning to fall apart and take a form of a crowd again. People howled and sighed and wailed at the sight of their two leaders meeting each other in battle. Shadows had completely taken over the crowd, and their black servos reached up to the platform Optimus and Megatron were standing on, reaching for them like worshippers in rapture, clawing at the ground to get a handful of red sand that had been beneath their pedes.

The sight both shocked and disgusted Optimus. He wanted it to stop.

Megatron let out a raspy laugh and charged towards him. “Look at them, Optimus!” he yelled as Optimus blocked the first strike from the Dark Starsaber, “look at them worshipping us!”

Megatron's optics shone feverishly bright, full of the purple taint of Unicron. Optimus glared back and attacked with the Decepticon Hunter, and Megatron met him in every move.

“Look at this pitiful mass of bots, admiring us! Wanting to be us! We are gods to them!” Megatron shouted as they locked blades, sprang apart and locked them once again. He shouted even though his venting was heavy and he panted in the scorching dry heat just like Optimus.

“You are wrong, Megatron! We are not above them!” Optimus yelled back and threw a thunderous wave of electricity from his weapon. Megatron split it with his blade and came out unharmed, but he was pushed back by the blast, grunting with his dentae bared.

Optimus advanced again, and Megatron was waiting for him.

“Your idealism is tiresome, Prime! Cast that aside and *look* at them! They need to be ruled! We could rule them! Together, my brother!”

The mass of limbs and energon and mouths screamed and cried. Shaky servos scratched at the ground and helpless, pleading optics stared up at Optimus and Megatron, begging for guidance, for help.

Optimus felt coolant welling in his optics again, and this time there was no void to keep it in place. “I will never join you!” he yelled and struck forth with the Decepticon Hunter, using all his might.

The blood of Unicron hummed in higher and higher frequency and then shattered like crystal. Pieces of the blade flew everywhere, the other half of it fell down on the red ground and turned into black crumbs. Megatron's optics widened when his weapon gave out.

Optimus' strike continued first through and then past the Dark Starsaber, and he tumbled forth with

it until his blade sank into Megatron's chassis. The power of the strike and the weight of Optimus' frame drove the blade in all the way to the hilt, and through the vibrating blade Optimus felt in his servos every destroyed system, fluids escaping their tubes and pipes and sloshing around, every snapped wire and cord, and finally the sparkchamber.

Megatron sank to his knees, bringing Optimus with him. Optimus leaned forward, almost leaning against the other mech's chassis as he felt his blade reach Megatron's spark and extinguish it.

They stared into each other's optics. Megatron wheezed and coughed, energon leaking from the corner of his mouth and dripping down his chin. He opened and closed his mouth as if trying to speak, but his processor was severed from too many systems to send a command to his vocalizer. Instead he lifted his servo, reaching out to Optimus' faceplate.

Optimus was trembling, clutching the hilt of the Decepticon Hunter like a lifeline as Megatron brushed the side of his face. His servo was already cold, but the energon staining it was warm.

"I'm..." Optimus started but didn't continue. He wanted to apologize, but that was absurd, and so he held his glossa.

Megatron's frame let out a low hum that was rapidly cycling down. His optics grew dimmer before flickering offline, and at the same moment his servo fell down, limp and lifeless just like the rest of him.

The dead gladiator slumped forward. Despite the hilt of the blade pressing painfully to Optimus' abdomen he caught the husk, put his arms around it and held it there. Despite the punishing heat Optimus could feel the warmth seeping out of the husk, how it grew cold against him, and as he realized this the tears broke out. He pressed his faceplate against the crook of Megatron's neck, rocked back and forth and wept.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. Seasonal greetings from me! Happy Yule/Winter Solstice/Christmas (or just holidays) to you, dear reader!



## But if I know you...

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Now was that so hard?” spoke a cold, deeply satisfied voice over the crying crowd.

At the moment Optimus couldn't care less about The Fallen, who had finally gotten what he wanted.

“Welcome to the core of the lesson, Optimus *Prime*,” The Fallen said, using the title like an insult.

“This is where all the roads lead. This is the end, the final station of your destiny. Aren't you glad you had the chance for a practice round before you go out there and put your new skills to practical use?”

“Go away,” Optimus grunted without lifting his helm. “I am tired of your games.”

The Fallen laughed. “Now now, don't be so bitter, little Prime! It doesn't suit you at all! We all must stop living inside our dreams one day and face the reality. This is that day for you, and how grand your dreams were is no one else's fault but your own. It's painful to have your spark shattered, but that is life, and you need to handle it.”

The truth in the older Prime's words were the edge they cut with. Optimus couldn't argue against them without being in blatant denial, and lying to himself wasn't like him at all.

Through all the stellar cycles of war and suffering he had kept this one dream close to his spark, the hope for a peaceful solution and the reunion of himself and Megatron. What a little thing it had felt like to wish for, but how great it truly was in its impossibility. The Fallen was right, giving up a dream was always painful, but having something so close to his spark torn out was beyond words.

Then, a completely new voice spoke: “You know nothing about anyone's destiny!”

Optimus turned his helm and located The Fallen who had clearly been taken by surprise and was staring at someone coming from direction to their right. Optimus lifted his helm enough to look to the same direction, and saw something that made his spark jump and sigh in relief.

Across the formless mass of soldiers towards them marched a tall, proud femme who was clearly absolutely furious. She was heavily built and square-shouldered, and from the back of her helm down her back ran thick cables and wires of gold and copper, making her helm shine in her personal glory. Her frame had been built inside heavy, complex armoring that arched and curved like a work of art, and rows and rows of complex carvings covered the thick plates on her shoulders, across her chassis, and layered on her front and on her forearms. She was painted mostly white like a pearl but the paint tinted to pure purple, and she radiated raw power through it all.

On her shoulder she carried a familiar weapon, a giant gold-plated hammer, a tell-tale sign about who she was.

“Ah, Solus Prime,” The Fallen said, smoothing out his image again. “I see you decided to join us after all.”

Solus marched all the way to them, almost flew the steps up before stopping before The Fallen, and let her forge crash to the ground before her pedes.

“How dare you!?” she said, her voice shaking with barely contained fury. Her clear optics shone

pure white light, and current cracked across her plating. “YOU UNCOUTH BEAST! YOU CURSED CREATURE OF DARKNESS! YOU MANIPULATIVE LITTLE PIECE OF HAZARDOUS WASTE!”

“Now now, Solus, let's remember our manners,” The Fallen tried to calm her down, bowing his helm and raising his servos.

“*This* is your idea of a lesson?! *This* is what you twisted out of his dreams?!” Solus demanded, ignoring The Fallen's attempt to pacify her and gestured at the scene around them.

“It is the truth,” The Fallen defended himself.

“This is *not* the truth!” Solus shrieked to the high heavens. “This is just your twisted version of an outcome that hasn't happened yet! You know absolutely nothing about him or the gladiator who foolishly took your worthless damned designation upon him! You know *nothing* about *anything*, you ignorant malicious good-for-nothing disgrace of a Prime!”

“Has anyone ever said you have quite the mouth, Solus dear?” The Fallen sourly muttered.

“ENOUGH!” Solus yelled. “You mute it this instant! This ends now!”

Optimus watched as the femme took a hold of her hammer and yanked it up and above her helm in a great arc that should have tipped her over, but her anger and strength kept her perfectly steady. With a terrifying battlecry Solus brought the hammer down to the ground. the impact created a melodic sound like a giant bell, and the collision shook everything around them.

Everything from the burning city to the rock and sand below them broke apart. The buildings grumbled into rubble and dust, the cries of soldiers disappeared when their frames broke apart revealing them to be only puppets, and the red sky above cracked like an old roof worn down by time and the elements. The world around shattered into beautiful rain of glimmering shards, like it all had been just a painting on glass, and it left behind only silence and a liquid black canvas beneath them, reflecting the bottomless void of space above.

Optimus felt clean. All the smotch and dirt and energon from the vision disappeared into black droplets that ran down his frame and joined the liquid mirror beneath him. The cold weight of a husk was gone like a nightmare. He heard a sound like water running and looked around in this new place Solus had revealed.

It was like he was sitting on the surface of a still, clear lake that stretched to the horizon where ever he looked. Stars were bright against the deep black above them and reflected in the water. It was incredibly beautiful and calm.

Solus lifted her forge on her shoulder again and pointedly turned her back to The Fallen, who kicked the water and scoffed to himself.

“And now you've broken it all! I thought you were supposed to create,” he muttered to Solus, who threw one last glare at him.

“Primus wasted completely fine metal when he created you!” she spat and started to walk towards Optimus. On every step the water beneath her pedes rippled gently, like a single flake of metal had landed on it, not an entire pede of a bot of her size.

Solus halted before Optimus and carefully set her forge down. She extended her servo to him and gazed at him, a gentle smile on her fierce features.

“I greet you, Optimus Prime. Are you alright? Let me help you up.”

Optimus took her servo and let her pull him up again. Solus stood taller than him, and he found himself out of words.

Solus smiled and bowed her helm. “I am Solus Prime, the Maker. To my great shame I must confess I originally didn't plan to partake in these tasks for you, but I think I have changed my mind. I have found something I should teach you.”

Still silent, Optimus nodded. Solus offered him a soft smile, and her features suddenly looked completely different than before with her fury for The Fallen on them.

“You honor me,” Optimus managed to mutter.

Solus' smile gained a sad tone and she sighed. “I wish I could accept your words, but the truth is I join you on a late cycle. I hope you do not judge us all by the deeds of our disgrace of a brother. Come, follow me.”

She started to lead the way across the black lake, and Optimus did as she asked. The presence of the Maker was humbling, just the sheer amount of power visibly radiating through her power-lines and cables underlined her might. Raw energy radiated across the air and hit right through Optimus' frame. Despite Solus' heavy armor plating her step was effortless and controlled, her long legs making her pace so fast Optimus had to hurry his own steps to keep up.

“I am truly sorry for what he put you through here,” Solus said. “But in some way even his terrible deeds have a place in the grand scheme of things, as does everything. What I am about to show – and hopefully to teach – you is very much tied to him and our unfortunate past.”

She was silent for a moment like honoring those regretful things she was talking about.

“But what is the past for if not to be learned from?” she added and threw a smile over her shoulder to Optimus.

Suddenly she stopped and gestured to him to do so too. “This is a good place,” she said and put her forge down. To Optimus the place they were standing at didn't look any different than the space they had just crossed, but he had a feeling Solus' reasoning wasn't anything he could or needed to understand.

Solus lifted her hammer in a wide arc like she had before, and brought it down with force to the surface of black water, making it ring like a bell once more. To Optimus' surprise the water didn't splash but instead rippled, high smooth waves sloshing in all directions along with the echo of the bell.

Mist was gathering and moving across the lake. It swam just above the surface, not quite touching it, and growing thicker by each moment, gathering up and starting to cover up the starry sky. Soon the mist wasn't just little shreds of cloud anymore, but thick swirls of steam and pure white smoke that got everywhere, sneaking around on the black water and reaching up for the sky, and Optimus realized yet another vision was slowly and elegantly taking form around them.

Solus beckoned him with her. “Come. Let us walk.”

Optimus followed her into the thick white mist. Towers of shimmering pearly mist surrounded them, but when Optimus tilted his helm back he saw the inky vastness of space above them.

Solus spoke with a heavy voice and Optimus' attention snapped to her: “I know you don't want to hear this, but please bear with me. Even though I condemn Megatronus' way of approach, he does

have a point, he knows what this is about. But Unicron has tainted him and bitterness rules his spark, so his actions were not helpful.”

“I see,” Optimus said as neutrally as he could. Whatever he thought about The Fallen, whatever the older Prime had done to him, it wasn't Solus Prime's fault, and so Optimus concentrated on letting go of his upset mindset in order to concentrate on the current moment.

“I wish to discuss these events and their core lesson with you before I send you to your task of my making,” Solus said, sounding almost apologetic and threw one piercing but reassuring look to Optimus, who nodded in agreement. Solus' pearl-white optics shone softly, illuminating her armor and driving the purple shadows away.

“You truly are to face the gladiator Megatron. That part was true, and you need to be prepared for every way your reunion will turn out,” she explained.

The mist was finally taking its final form around them, freezing in place and transforming into matter. Little by little it became a street, then lampposts and lights, then walls and bridges and windows until they were now longer walking upon water through void, but on a road through a city. The mist became illusions of traffic and people, noises of busy city life surrounding them, and the last wisps of the mist filled up lights of billboards and signs, turning them into colourful neon.

When the street and the people were bathing in the sea of almost too bright lights, Optimus recognized the place even though it wasn't an exact replica of the real thing.

“Are we in Kaon again?” he asked.

“Oh, yes indeed. You have an excellent optic,” Solus said.

“Thank you, but... This isn't the Kaon I know,” Optimus said, half asking. The city had much more in common with the ancient Kaon The Fallen had showed him than the city he had visited in his time, but there was something different in it. Mostly it was the materials. In many places where The Fallen had imagined stone Solus had imagined metal and glass, but the architecture as a whole wasn't noticeably different.

Solus shrugged. “Yes, I know. It has been quite some time since I last visited Kaon, but I thought it would be good for it to at least resemble the city you recall, so I gave it a modern touch. I hope it will suffice.”

“It does, yes,” Optimus replied, but absently. He wasn't paying that much attention to the minor details as he was waiting for the test with anticipation. He doubted Solus could or would unleash anything worse on him than The Fallen had, but something about her soft voice and gentle mannerism made him feel like there was something in an entirely different way terrible waiting for him.

“Please try to forget all that The Fallen showed you,” Solus said, but with a strain in her voice implying she knew that Optimus couldn't. “In his mind there's only one way your reunion will turn out, and that is a tragedy. He wanted you to taste cruelty, and hate this gladiator friend of yours, but the truth is he cannot know what will happen. No one can. Not even Alpha Trion could, not even with the Covenant and the Quill I forged for him. The path of fate is not clear and narrow, if there is a path to begin with.”

“Then what lesson or a skill you can give me if you have no idea what is expecting me?” Optimus asked, but at the same time a thought popped into his mind. “You are not going to forge me a new weapon, are you?”

Solus gave a mournful sigh. "I will not forge another weapon ever again, do not fret. I trusted Megatronus once enough to forge into existence the Requiem Blaster he desired, and that very weapon extinguished my spark. No, a weapon is not what you need, no matter what Micronus Prime thinks. And I cannot teach you combat skills or hand you brutal force."

"Then what?"

Solus didn't answer right away. They turned a corner, crossed a street and took long narrow stairs down to a subsurface level of the city, where the streets were sinuous and the light was completely artificial.

"The only thing I can truly prepare for the unknown future is your spark, my young brother," Solus said they were once again walking on a sidewalk, side by side despite the crowd. "You can't know the future and you can't know everything about others, but you can know yourself. You can be honest to yourself and learn to understand who you are. Once you do that, you can trust yourself to make the right decision, whatever the future will bring."

Optimus had to smile and chuckle a bit. He and Solus had many things in common, so much so that it felt almost as if he was preaching to himself.

"What?" Solus asked, smiling at his amusement.

Optimus shook his helm with a smile. "Nothing, I just feel like I've said something similar to others on numerous occasions. I suppose I didn't take my own advice as often as I thought."

Solus allowed herself to chuckle as well. "I've learned that sometimes the thing about advice is the support of others, even if the message is something you already know."

They walked in comfortable silence for a while. Optimus used the time to truly appreciate the creativity Solus had put in the vision of Kaon, and to his surprise spotted many things that were accurate. It would seem the city of Kaon had had more history in it than it first let on.

"Come, in here," Solus suddenly said and turned to follow a bright pink arrow pointing at stairs leading to a basement level of a building, and to an open door there. They walked down and stepped inside.

The establishment turned out to be a bar of some kind, even if relatively calm in Kaonian standards. The basement bar composed of several different rooms all connected to each other with wide open doorways, and even though it looked almost full, bots were sitting mostly in their own groups, ignoring each other.

Solus lead the way to a corner table, and Optimus followed right at her heel. No one looked at them when they sat down. Solus put her hammer down and let it lean against the wall. Then she put both her servos on the table and crossed them.

"People adore tragic love stories," Solus said out of blue. "And I don't blame them, they make moving tales. But in the context of real life tragedies are just that: Tragic. Painful. Ugly. One day you are in love and think you are immortal, the next day your own blaster shoots a hole in your chassis, the end. Reality doesn't form a satisfying story arc."

Optimus didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything at all. He had already seen Solus' fury as well as her soft kindness, but now her gaze was stern like the one of a general discussing battle tactics. Something else lurked beneath the icy surface though, something ugly that resembled bitterness.

Solus sighed but didn't turn her gaze away. She looked determined. "People say love is good, but that is not true. It simply is, like things do. Love is not all-powerful, love is not special, love is not victorious, love is not eternal. But a person in love believes all those things, even if they themselves don't realize it, and that's what makes love dangerous."

"Fallen already reminded me about something similar," Optimus said. For some reason Solus' words were painful to hear, and he started to suspect he didn't know his own spark that well after all.

"So he did, but only through making your beloved into a monster. He is selfish and didn't care to show or teach you anything, he simply wanted to hurt you. It was as simple as that," Solus said, digits clasp together harder. The words sounded like they were hard to say. "I speak hard truths now, but really the only one who can teach you anything about the secret depths of your spark is you yourself."

Optimus hummed to himself sadly and frowned. "I am not entirely sure I know how to reach those depths."

"I know how you feel. Being a Prime – and the Matrix-bearer of all things – is a difficult task. You have a reputation and a duty, and we know how dedicated you were. But Optimus, my young brother, hear me: The war is over. The task you were called forth to do in your life is now finished. Now is the perfect chance to listen to your spark and experience something beyond the horrors of war."

"I don't understand," Optimus confessed, his frown deepening. "You said all those awful things about love, and now you want me to embrace it? Even though I don't know if- " he paused, suddenly very self-aware. He averted his gaze and shook his helm. "...It was such a long time ago. I was young."

Solus smiled with sympathy. "I know it has been a long time. Many things have happened, and you don't even know how you feel anymore. I know. But now there are no more responsibilities for you, and no one else can tell you what to feel or what to do about it. You are about to have a reunion, that much is certain, so my task for you is to learn what it is exactly that you feel and what you want. Then you will be ready to leave this place."

Solus got up from her place and reached for her hammer. Optimus was still sitting down and chewing her words, turning them over and pondering them with an expression that was pure confusion and uncertainty. Solus had already lifted her hammer on her shoulder again and was about to leave, when Optimus asked her one last question: "Why do you ask that of me even though you just said that love not victorious or special at all?"

"Well... What I meant was that love is not fundamentally any of those things. But what do I know, the world is a mysterious place. And my strongest point is that this is your decision, Optimus. Not one else, not I, not Megatronus, not even Primus can or will make it for you. That is your duty, right and gift."

Optimus had to smile at that. Solus returned the smile, then waived him goodbye and walked out, and just as she had stepped out of the door a group of new customers barged in, bringing with them the missing Kaonian commotion. The group had at least eight bots, all roaring with laughter and chatting with loud voices, some had arms around each other's shoulders, and they made their way to the bar counter, knocking over stools and bumping into other bots as they did so.

The way the others gave way to the noisy group hinted that the group was infamous, so they were either criminals or -

“Barkeep! High-grade!”

“Let your best high-grade flow like energon in the Pits! Give us the drink of the champion!”

“To the undefeated champion of Kaon!”

Gladiators. Noisy, celebrating, energon-stained gladiators. Optimus felt suddenly shaky and nervous and eyed the group of large, battered bots in search of a familiar figure he wasn't any more ready to face now than he had been in any one of the sadistic tests The Fallen had crafted for him.

One large mech leaned into the embrace of even larger femme behind him, and the third one laid down on the bar counter to retrieve a bottle from a low shelf themselves, and in the middle of the group Optimus saw whom he was looking for.

Megatron stood there with a grin on his face, a confident aura of a champion rolling off him in waves, and sand and dust making his gray plating appear matte. It was almost as if he felt Optimus' gaze on him because a klik later his helm turned and they locked optics.

They stared for a moment, and Megatron's grin gained a whole another tone. He pushed his comrades out of the way and walked towards Optimus, then sat down in his table without an invitation.

“You look like you have something to say to me, little one,” Megatron said.

Optimus opened his mouth but didn't find words. All air had suddenly left him, and he could almost feel his core temperature spiking without checking his parameters. He had no idea how to talk to this Megatron. Was this the first time they met? Should he play this according to that? How could he tell his true feelings to a mech who didn't know him?

Megatron raised an optic ridge. “Come one, little mech. Be out with it. I don't have all eternity.”

Optimus swallowed. Maybe it didn't matter what he assumed. Unlike The Fallen, Solus wouldn't play mind games with him. Maybe this scene was a blank slate that he could make his own instead of playing according to her version. He wanted to trust Solus Prime, and hadn't she just sharpened to him that only his personal feelings mattered?

He took a deep breath. “I have seen you do so much terrible things I don't know how to feel about you as a person,” he started, coughing the words out like he was trying to purge his tank of intruding substance, but after the first confession and with Megatron's receptive silence encouraging him, the words started to flow.

“I don't know what I felt when we met. It was like you woke me up from my dull existence, showed me that I was allowed to want things and ask for the things I wanted, that our society was the one that had to be changed, not me. You made me see and feel things I didn't know existed, and I looked up to you so much. I felt a connection, and... at the time I thought I had fallen in love. Like we were meant for each other.”

The memories flooded his processor, the files he had firmly pushed in the back of his processor and hadn't visited in a long time were suddenly all streaming at once. They were bittersweet memories, full of longing and sweet tickle of a crush, but regret had overwritten much of the original content. But he had started his confession and couldn't back away anymore, and so he stared into Megatron's red optics and continued.

“But you were nothing like I imagined. You are a truly terrible person, Megatron. You killed so many, and you hurt my friends, you tortured those you knew were close to me, and you have tried

to extinguish my spark countless times. I don't know if anything I thought I knew and wanted about you really exists at all. And still... I... I still... I never could bring myself to kill you. I saw chances from time to time, but never seized any of them.”

He didn't know what to say then. He felt emotions welling up inside of him in chaos unlike any he had ever felt before.

For the first time Megatron spoke: “You didn't finish your sentence in the middle of that flood.”

Optimus had to laugh even though the sound was shaky and breathless: Megatron sounded just like himself. He felt a pang in his spark.

Megatron pressed on: “You still, you said. What? You still what?”

“I think I still want you to be with me,” Optimus said with a weak chuckle, like that was the greatest ironic twist in history. “Someday, somehow, somewhere. I don't know how, but I think I still hope for that. Despite everything you are and what you have done, if only you stopped destroying things around you...”

“So you want me to change,” Megatron said, narrowing his optics.

Optimus shook his helm. “I'd take it all, all your awfulness and fury and whatever you are carrying with you, I'd take it and accept it, if you only stopped doing such cruel things. I'd take it, I'd take *you*, and I would keep you and be with you as long as there's light in my spark.”

Megatron carefully measured him with his optics, tilting his helm to this way and the other, his expression unreadable. The noise only increased around them, the gladiators were drinking and celebrating, and apparently either more of their comrades had arrived or the other customers were starting to warm up to their mood. Bots were starting to sing. A bottle fell on the floor and shattered.

“Tell me, Optimus,” Megatron said suddenly. It was like their surroundings didn't exist at all. “Do you love me?”

Someone had found some spare credits and jammed them into a jukebox in the corner, and the out-of-tune singing got music to back it up, but Optimus didn't hear or see anything except Megatron before him. This was the million credit question, wasn't it? The truth was somewhere within him, just waiting to get out.

Optimus swallowed and licked his lipplates. “I don't know. I want to find out.”

Megatron's expression revealed nothing, of course it didn't. Optimus would have to face the real Megatron out in the world of the living to get a reaction that would mean anything. His memory feed was full of Megatron's expressions ranging from his smug smirk to the cold stare of a killer, from his cruel snarl to the one of absolute rage, to his laughter, and to a memory that Optimus didn't realize he had: Optimus himself was kneeling in a dark cave of some sort, his helm swimming and nausea turning his tank. Megatron walked towards him with his sword bared, stopping right before him. Optimus was so confused he called him by the first name he had learned the gladiator was called, and for a klik Megatron's face was full of conflict, surprise and a faintest hint of longing before it was covered with frustration. The sword disappeared beneath his arm plating.

Optimus felt yet another pang in his spark, the entire sparkchamber seemed to be shaking, and he wanted nothing more than to reach out and touch him.



But this was nothing more than a vision, a dream where only he was truly real. There was no one to touch. He felt terribly lonely.

He sighed, his servos squeezing into fists. "I miss you so much."

Megatron at the other end of the small table sighed too and leaned back, his face relaxing into a calm expression of acceptance. "There we go."

Everything dissolved into mist, and soon Optimus found himself standing alone on the rippling surface of the black lake, stars above him and the faint song of running water somewhere was the only sound in the emptiness.

## Chapter End Notes

We are nearing the end of this fic, folks! Thank you for all your amazing comments and kudos you left on the precious chapters, they mean the world to me. <3

Solus Prime is such a fun character to write. I had practically zero canon material to work with, but her tfwiki page nudged me and I enjoyed the freedom of basically crafting a version of my own.

As always, thank you for reading, and don't be shy to let me know what you thought about this chapter!

# Once upon a dream

## Chapter Summary

Whoo, the plot thickens! This is how, in my opinion, RiD should have turned out. After this chapter only the epilogue remains, folks! Thank you so much for all your kudos and comments on the past chapters, I've had a lot of fun reading and replying to you.

This seems like a good time to link the theme of this whole story, Lana del Rey's cover of "[Once upon a dream](#)".

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bumblebee was worried but for the sake of the others did his best to conceal it. He tried to harness his anxiety and play it off like battle rage, just like he was sure Optimus would have done; whatever it took to shake the uneasy feeling he didn't recall feeling in a long time. He was a war veteran for Primus' sake! He had navigated hot spots as a scout, even fought in the front line, this should be nothing compared to some things he had been through!

But Strongarm and Sideswipe had been captured, they needed help, and they were both bots under his command. Bumblebee hadn't ever before had his own command, and he still hadn't quite grasped what responsibility like this truly meant or how it was to be handled. He often wondered that if he had this hard a time with a group of only five bots, how had Optimus managed with the entirety of the Autobot army under his command.

Bumblebee wished he could just ask him, but Optimus wasn't there, so he'd have to survive on his own.

Besides, he wasn't alone. Strongarm and Sideswipe might have been captured but their signals were still online, and Drift and Grimlock were right behind him while Fix-It manned their base. He could do this, he would figure out what the 'Cons were planning and he would put a stop to it, without his mentor and with the support of his team.

\*

Transporting from the Realm of the Primes back to the plane of the living was bizarrely easier than any other form of travel involving portals Optimus had ever experienced. At one moment he was before the Primes who wished him luck with grave expressions, and on the next he was standing in bright sunshine on a planet of which air smelled familiar: oxygen, water, organic flora.

It was definitely Earth, just like the Primes had promised it would be, but he didn't have the time to stand around and wonder. Megatron would be there as well any moment now, and knowing him he wouldn't make a quiet entrance.

It would also seem that events were already in motion. Optimus had arrived at a place he faintly recalled being Bumblebee and his team's base, and not far away from him there was a Decepticon intruder who was making his way towards a low building.

Optimus didn't recognize this particular foe nor did he have time to care. The Decepticon had his back turned to Optimus, who decided he could just as well test his new weapon and stretch a little bit. He charged forth, the Decepticon heard his steps, spun around and drew his weapons even when his optics widened in surprise. Optimus broke through his defenses easily, stunned the 'Con with the Decepticon Hunter and kicked his enemy down. It was all over in a few klicks.

Just when Optimus lifted his gaze from his currently unconscious enemy, he found those he had been looking for: Bumblebee's team mates, or at least a few of them: Two humans and a minicon.

Optimus knelt down. "You are... Denny. And Russel," he said, recalling the names with some difficulty, but regardless pressed forth. "I need to speak with Bumblebee immediately."

"He went to rescue Strongarm and Sideswipe from Steeljaw's pack," the older human, Denny, hastily explained.

"I'll pin-point his location!" Fix-It offered right away, already tapping away on the device in his servos.

Russel stepped forward and looked up to Optimus with a worried expression. "Optimus... Are you here because a great evil is really coming?"

Optimus averted his gaze and looked up to the sky instead. The story was much too long to explain right now, especially since he himself didn't know the end of it yet.

"If it's not here already," he replied, hoping with all his spark that Megatron wasn't. He knew too well what the other was prepared to do to gain his attention.

"But you've completed the training Bumblebee told us about," said Denny, full of open trust.

Optimus stood up again and straightened his spinal strut. "I shall face any challenge to the best of my abilities," he said vaguely. One urgent want pulsed in his spark, a longing that made him both excited and anxious. He was going to see Megatron again, and oh how much he wanted that.

"Got him!" Fix-It said, the device in his servo beeping. "They're near Ground City along the river front."

Optimus' spark jumped. "I must go."

Of course the humans wanted to accompany him, they always did. Curiosity seemed to be the defining trait of the species, and not always a virtuous one. It was only Russel's argument about helping with evacuation that made Optimus accept the request, since this was Megatron they were dealing with. He knew fully well how ugly it could get, and no matter how selfish he was about to be he wouldn't want to attach a body count to this decision.

Optimus drove as fast as he dared with passengers on board, and when he finally arrived by the river according to Fix-It's directions, he saw that it had already started.

The small cape before the city where a tall statue stood was crawling with Decepticons who were apparently trying to build something. All the way from the other shore the wide metal arch was clearly visible, as well as several power banks and a reactor they were hooked into. Strong current was already dashing across the arch and the statue that acted like some sort of an antennae.

Optimus quickly assessed the situation: The reaction the arch was causing was blackening the sky and drawing power from the city around it; there were prisoners strapped into the statue, most

likely Bumblebee's captured teammates; there was a fight going on already; and finally, some sort of a reaction was already happening in the middle of the arch. The shimmering blue current and flame it was producing and gathering in the middle of it made Optimus see it what it truly was. The arch wasn't just a part of the reactor, it was a gateway, and someone was coming through it.

“Take care of the civilians!” Optimus commanded Denny and Russel before dashing forward, jumping off the riverbank and firing up his jetpack, flying across the water towards the blue light.

His pedes hit the pavement and he felt it crack underneath his careless landing. He squeezed the Decepticon Hunter in his servo and walked towards the steps leading up to the platform the arch was built upon. There was no one to stop him as the Decepticons were engaged in fights with the Autobots, and the leader Steeljaw was wrenching one last lever down for a power boost to the arch.

The blue light had created almost a solid energy field in the arch. It rippled like the surface of a lake and a clearly bot-shaped shadow was diving up.

Optimus' spark beat fast. As his spark worked overtime he felt his frame becoming more charged than the Decepticon Hunter in his servo, the handle of the weapon feeling almost cold. He battled a flood of emotion, trying to keep his helm clear and above the currents where fear and joy and excitement battled, urging his spark to pound in his chassis faster and harder.

Just a moment longer, he would wait. Just one moment more.

A mech stepped through the portal. A tall, broad-shouldered mech with armor plating of a bot clearly built for battle, marched with a slow pace, helm bowed and shoulders squared in determination. Where ever he was coming from was not from this plane of existence as proved by the foreign wind blowing through the portal with him. His plating was mostly black as if the blackness of space had been permanently printed on him, but his faceplate was still gray, simple metal with no paint on it, and with familiar scars and red optics still in it.

Optimus knew that face.

After long kliks that drew out like eternity the mech finally stepped completely into this world and the portal behind him smoothed out.

Optimus stood at the base of the stairs, staring up at the mech who was staring him back. Time seemed to stand still when they just looked at each other.

Despite all the promises and warnings the dominant feeling in Optimus was disbelief. He felt so stunned and unreal looking at the face of a mech he had said farewell to so long ago, so many times, that all that left his vocalizer was: “It cannot be...”

“But it is,” answered a voice that was just as familiar as his face. “Believe and accept it: Megatron stands before you once again!”

Everyone on the battlefield stilled to gape at the former Emperor of Destruction who now stood before them in all his glory and with a sword in servo. Optimus hadn't even noticed the weapon because it was so plain, just a regular sword with a long and wide blade and two edges and only as long as Megatron's leg. It was nothing compared to the weapons he had wielded during the war and nothing compared to the one in Optimus' servos, but it was a weapon. Megatron was here to fight.

Megatron turned his helm to Steeljaw who was closest to him, covering in uncertainty and ready to bolt. “You have my thanks for the gateway, Steeljaw. But I don't need it anymore,” Megatron said,

raised his modest weapon and struck it into the reactor closest to him.

The destruction of one component of the arch triggered a rapid chain reaction, and a series of explosions when systems overloaded along with a string of fire that spread through the entire structure. The focused energy of the arch shot away, overloading all the systems in its wake and finally discharging around them in one massive fallout that swept over them.

Smoke cleared out, exposing the fried remains of the arch, Megatron who casually yanked his sword out of the reactor, and very confused Steeljaw whose optics bounced between the destruction and the warlord.

“Don't take that as a gesture of dismissal,” Megatron said to him. “You did well.”

Steeljaw perked up. “Well, it was the least we could do. Now, shall we discuss the reward you promised us? You handing me the possession of this world?”

Megatron gave a snorting laugh through his grin and shook his helm to himself. “No wonder you never made it through the ranks of my army for you are quite the fool.”

“What?!”

Megatron swung his sword around in his servo so the blade was upright and ready for battle. “You heard me. It's not my fault you believe I have the power to just hand over a world to you, a world I have not conquered and thus hold no power over. I can give you my approval of attempting its conquest, but I wonder... If you can't swat one team of newsparks, how would you fare against the armies of the indigenous population?”

Steeljaw bared his dentae and flattened his helmfins. “You lied to us!”

Megatron rolled his optics. “And you believed it. Now go do as you wish and stop bothering me! I did not defy death and travel across unknown dimensions to listen to your whining!”

“Then what?! What is mighty Megatron doing here if not conquering?!” Steeljaw snapped back, encouraged by his comrades that gave him the advantage in number.

“I am here to attend a personal matter,” Megatron replied softly and turned his gaze from the Decepticons to Optimus. “We have unfinished business.”

Megatron swished his blade across the air a few times as if testing its weight and balance, then started to advance towards Optimus without breaking their optic contact. Optimus raised the Decepticon Hunter and waited.

Steeljaw seemed to quickly come to the conclusion that Megatron engaging the Prime was as useful as anything else and quickly regrouped his troops. “Decepticons! Destroy the Autobots!”

Behind Optimus Bumblebee and Drift were hastily reassessing the situation.

“Megatron? As in... Megatron of Kaon, the founder of the Decepticons?” Drift asked Bumblebee, who seemed to have completely locked up.

“Optimus Prime...,” he breathed.

Optimus mentally scolded himself for not giving Bumblebee a forewarning. His sudden appearance must have been quite a shock.

“Fix-It! Is this the same Megatron who disappeared after the Great Civil War?” Drift spoke to his commline.

Whatever he got back, Optimus couldn't hear. Quickly he turned to Bumblebee to bark the last line of orders he would have time for: “Bumblebee! Free your teammates and defeat Steeljaw and his troops! Leave Megatron to me!”

If Bumblebee answered something Optimus didn't catch it, but the scout and Drift bolted into action and away from him, and so he cast it from his mind. Now it was just him and Megatron. There was nothing else but the two of them.

“Megatron... What is the meaning of this?!” Optimus asked. He didn't know what to say or how to speak to the other, but he craved answers anyway. “I have been sent by the Primes to face a great evil threatening Earth! What are your plans?”

Megatron scoffed. “I don't care about this organic rock or anyone else, Prime! I came here to settle things between you and me!”

He pulled his sword up, charged and struck it down with all his might. Optimus met the blow with the Decepticon Hunter, and charge crackled between them as they pressed into the blade lock. His spark was still beating fast with excitement that almost hurt, and even though Megatron was here to kill him, he was there. Optimus almost frightened himself with how much joy he still felt at that.

“Then let's settle them!” Optimus said. “Primus himself brought me back from the Allspark and the Thirteen prepared me for this moment, so give me all you've got!”

Megatron made a powerful twisting motion with his hip that traveled through his frame and all the way to his sword, and they sprang apart only to sprint back together again. They locked blades again and again, and the Decepticon Hunter vibrated, sang and spit energy spikes all around them, securing them inside a field of storming currents.

Bots around them were engaged in battle as well. Bumblebee had freed his team and armed them, and their small group was playing tightly together to match Steeljaw and his followers. Blasters went off every now and then, but mostly the air was full of thundering pedesteps and clashes and whines of charged up blades.

“Don't think you are the only one with additional power, Optimus!” Megatron yelled over the noise of battle. “I sought out Primus himself so we could settle this! I dived into the Well of Allsparks, met the Creator themselves and impressed them enough so they sent me here!”

Optimus was so surprised by the claim that Megatron's sword got through his defense, and the flat of the blade smacked him on his side. He grunted, stumbled back to regain his defense and stared at Megatron with narrowed optics.

“You lie! Why would Primus grant you an opportunity like this?! Primus is order and creation!”

Megatron toyed with his sword with a smile on his features. “I speak the truth, Optimus. I faced the trials of Primus and pulled through! I walked through strange dimensions to come back here, armed with what Primus gave me, to face you!”

Optimus stalked closer, the weapon still cold in his servos, and ready to fight. But curiosity was quickly gaining more ground in his processor; nothing Megatron said made any sense, but even if it was all just lies he couldn't see what the other would accomplish that way. Megatron stood alone now. In a sense they both did: There was no war, no armies, nothing to fight for. Cybertron had

made peace and moved on, and the two of them had been left behind.

Could they ignite the old hatred again? Could they plummet their people back to the fire? Visions of red battlefields Optimus had just left filled his processor and he shivered. They were powerful beings, so powerful that he wouldn't put it past them to start everything all over again. He wished he could drop that power, to make it into nothing and throw them both back into anonymity and powerlessness simply for the sake of Cybertron's future, even though they had fought to get away from all that in the beginning. It was just that Optimus didn't want to do it anymore, he didn't want to be that person anymore and he would give his everything all over again to make a new path.

"I ended this once already!" Optimus said, steeling his voice so that it too wouldn't shiver. "Why... Why wouldn't you just let me stay dead?! It's over, Megatron! *Over!*"

Megatron roared and leaped forward, bringing his sword down with his whole weight. Optimus took a step aside and the sword sank into the concrete and made it crack like glass. Ground seemed to shift under their pedes.

Megatron's blazing optics stared up to him, closer than Optimus would have preferred. He brought the Decepticon Hunter before him in a defensive position, but Megatron smacked his servo aside with his own.

"You dared to... You dared to offline before me!" he growled. "You left me! You left me behind! What was I supposed to do!?"

Optimus blinked and frowned. His spark spun and spun like a comet caught in a gravitational pull, about to burn out any klik now. "What are you talking about?! Megatron... What?"

"I went to Primus to get you back," Megatron said, yanking his sword out of the ground, "I told them we aren't finished yet! They showed me things... They showed me the reality of my dreams! The real you, and the real me, and what we really are!"

Optimus' optics widened. All that sounded too familiar and he felt a painfully hopeful doubt crawling down his spinal strut. He forgot his defenses again.

Megatron threw himself against Optimus, slamming his shoulder against his chassis and sent him stumbling backwards again.

"Can you understand how painful that was?!" Megatron yelled.

Optimus gritted his dentae. "I was tested by the Primes! I, too, saw the truth I was blind to before!"

"And do you know real pain now?" Megatron asked, almost a whisper. Their blades locked again, and they wrestled. The Decepticon Hunter hummed against the plain sword Megatron held.

"I've watched you die," Optimus whispered back.

They sprang apart again.

Megatron had a strange expression on his faceplate, one Optimus couldn't recall seeing before. It was not the guarded and defiant expression of a gladiator, not the fierceness of a rebel and not the mask of cold rage of a warlord. Optimus dared to smile.

"Why are you here, Megatron?" he asked.

A blast of energy out of nowhere hit Megatron, making him shout and stumble. It made a gray burn

mark on his plating and left it smoking but otherwise didn't hurt him, simply made him angry. Optimus turned his helm to the direction where the blast had come from, looking for an explanation and found Bumblebee with his team mates, Decepticon Hunters in servos, trying to help.

“Don't intervene!” Optimus shouted to them. “This is between Megatron and myself! Let us settle this, you secure the Decepticon fugitives!”

“But Optimus - !” Bumblebee argued back.

“No, Bumblebee! This is not a fight of your generation! Take your team and focus on your mission!”

Bumblebee's team coaxed their leader away and to action, and Optimus turned his attention back to his own opponent. Once this was over he would take time to be proud of Bumblebee, but not now.

“Your generation', Optimus?” Megatron said, almost chuckling, as he raised his sword into a battle pose again, slowly walking across the space the blast had put between them. “Are we really that old, things of the past?”

“We ended an era,” Optimus answered, raising the Decepticon Hunter in a mirroring pose. “We tore down the caste system and burned down everything! We ended our civilization as we knew it! The new generation rebuilds our world, and we need to let them do it!”

“Oh spare me the speech, as if I don't know what I've done,” Megatron said, pushing the issue aside. He swung his sword almost lazily as he attacked, and Optimus didn't have any difficulties knocking the blows aside. “I have no interest in war or conquests!”

Optimus took the aggressive role in turn, pierced through Megatron's weak defense and brought the heel of his palm down just under his chassis, forcing him back. “Then what?! Why have you brought us here? What did Primus make you realize that he brought me here for?!”

Optimus charged, but Megatron stepped aside so the Decepticon Hunter struck past him, spitting out lightning and sparks as it sank into the ground. Rubble flew and black smoke enveloped them completely for a moment. Megatron took a hold of Optimus' sword arm and yanked him towards himself.

“I came here for you. I came to see you one more time, my dearest enemy.”

Optimus stared up at him while trying to wrench his arm free. Megatron stared back, unblinking and determined, and as far as Optimus could tell, purely truthful.

“You told Primus you wanted to see me and he allowed that? Just like that? What is this tale you are spinning for me, Megatron?!” Optimus demanded to know.

Megatron let go of his arm and shoved him back. “That is the truth, Prime!” He struck with his sword again, aiming at Optimus' bared side, but the other managed to dodge in time. “I faced trials over this! I convinced him!”

“I was tested as well! By the Thirteen themselves, and I am armed with their wisdom. I know who I am and what I want, and I also know you, Megatron! I won't believe just anything you say, especially when you dare to come back here on Earth, a planet you nearly destroyed simply because I was fond of it, and attack me!” Optimus threw back at him, hammering his point in with blows from the Decepticon Hunter.



It was impossible to tell if the battle was still going on around them. The Decepticon Hunter spat out so much energy and sparks it electrified the air around them, and pieces of metal flew in the spiraling winds around them among smoke and the dust they raised from the ground. It was impossible for them to see anything besides each other inside the storm, and neither one cared.

Megatron snarled in frustration and slammed his blade against Optimus' so hard it made his arms shake. "How else was I supposed to come to see you?! I'll have you know that it was the only wish Primus granted for me, seeing you! I came all this way, through other worlds and through forbidden sacred places, just to lay my optics on you once more! That's how much I missed you!"

The words tugged on Optimus' spark painfully. They made him feel lightheaded and giddy, and he wanted nothing more than to believe them, lay down his sword and pretend the world with past and future and consequences didn't exist and wait for them just outside the smoke curtain. "Oh, I missed you too," he admitted in a quiet voice, "I never stopped missing you. During all those long stellar cycles of war I missed you."

Megatron's expression shifted again. His sword trembled and Optimus felt it across their locked blades. Megatron blinked in what looked like surprise that threatened to turn into joy, but the mech himself was too cynical to accept things at face value.

"Primus showed me how much you hated me," he said and narrowed his optics. "He showed how much the warlord I became disgusted you. He showed how little I actually considered your feelings, how selfishly I just wanted you to satisfy my own. And now you claim you have missed me? Liar!"

A smile that had almost sneaked on Optimus' face vanished. It was his turn to blink, and the blade lock dissolved again. Optimus stumbled, and this time his pedes met nothingness instead of ground. He fell down a slippery river bank and then his pedes hit water but he didn't sink. The tip of the Decepticon Hunter touched the surface, and steam rose.

Megatron followed him with one leap, landing right before Optimus, the surface of the river rippling but not giving out. It all made Optimus think of Solus Prime, how she had walked up to The Fallen and undone all his illusions and misconceptions, and he felt more powerful just by the memory.

"I saw you for what you really are, Megatron. It was my trial. The Fallen showed me versions of you, he made me watch you be cruel, wrathful and bitter, and then he made me kill you," Optimus spoke. Saying those things aloud was surprisingly painful, like he was baring something deeply personal or saying a prayer. But Megatron was listening, and so he went on: "I killed you in my trial. I killed you, held you when you went offline, and then I wept for you. All those years we waged war... I knew I would weep for you."

They walked in a circle that slowly spiraled inward, bringing them closer together. The tips of their swords traced the surface, drawing a line in their wake that disappeared almost immediately.

"Don't think me naive. I have seen you, and I still missed and wanted you," Optimus said while holding Megatron's gaze. "And now I am here to see how the next chapter of our story turns out. I, too, wanted to see you again. Nothing more."

Megatron was silent. His mouth was a hard line and his optics blazed with something that Optimus couldn't name, but knew he was struggling internally to grasp the meaning of his words.

"Why do you attack me, Megatron?" Optimus asked softly.

Megatron chuckled and rolled his optics. He lifted his sword and inspected it closely. “Primus armed me with this. Do you know what this is?”

“It's a sword.”

Megatron chuckled again. “This is the Ender. My first sword, the one I fought with in my very first pit fight and continued to do so until I managed to get a better one.” He laid his other servo on the edge of the blade and dragged his thumb along it. The metal didn't break. “Of course, it's an old and modest blade. It doesn't even have a cutting edge anymore.”

He turned to look at Optimus who stared back. The Decepticon Hunter was still pointing at the river's surface.

“Did you happen to consider the possibility that we might be star-crossed lovers?” Optimus asked in a quiet voice.

Megatron narrowed his optics at the déjà vu, but didn't let that distract him. “We were never lovers,” he countered.

Optimus was quiet for a moment. The circle had already wound shut. Their shoulders touched. He shrugged. “We could become lovers now.”

They stilled, shoulder to shoulder, swords hanging useless by their sides. Optimus hoped Megatron would say something soon before his spark would burst in his chassis. He felt vulnerable and exposed and hopeful, like he had just taken his spark out of its chamber and offered it to Megatron in the cup of his palms, and in that moment it was all he wanted to do.

“There's nothing I'd rather do than just that,” Megatron said.

Optimus finally withdrew his battlemask and let go of the Decepticon Hunter. On the moment his servo left the handle of the weapon its power went out, and then the river surface gave out under their pedes.

The drop into the water startled them both and they instinctively clutched at each other for support. The water muffled their voices but didn't obscure their expressions as they slowly sank towards the bottom. The dim Decepticon Hunter and the Ender sank as well, drifting down the current, all forgotten.

Megatron held on to Optimus with both of his servos and pulled him closer. The inky black paint on Megatron's plating dissolved in the water and was washed away until he was bare gray again. Green bubbles rose from their seams and floated between them towards the surface when Megatron wrapped Optimus in an embrace, and Optimus' arms came around him like it was the most natural thing in the world. Megatron flexed his digits against Optimus sides and leaned closer to see him better underwater. The river was relatively clear, but they still leaned forward until their helms touched and their optics couldn't focus properly anymore.

It was Optimus who finally pressed their lipplates against each other. The kiss was strange and much more a symbolic gesture than a proper good kiss, a show of affection long over-due, and it tasted like river water, sand and algae.

Their pedes met the sandy, rocky bottom of the river, and they stopped floating. Rays of sunlight reached the bottom but were tinted green and reflected from the scales of schools of small silver fish swimming by. It was perfectly quiet down there.

Optimus activated their private comm frequency that hadn't been used in hundreds of thousands of

stellar cycles.

*We can't stay here.*

*I know, Megatron replied.*

*We should walk up over there and then...*

*Explain ourselves to the newsparks?*

*Precisely. We have some explaining to do... And much to talk about.*

Reluctantly they pulled away from each other's arms and started to walk towards the shore, arms around each other.

## Chapter End Notes

They have got to stop meeting like this...

Thank you for reading! If you liked this, leave kudos and maybe even leave a comment below! I welcome all feedback and thoughts you have about this story. If you have a lot to say, feel free to leave constructive criticism or go full 9th grade English on this and analyze. Or just say hi, whatever works!

# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The last stasis pod shuffled shut and the day's work was done just when the sun was beginning to set. Grimlock dusted off his servos and sneaked out from behind the tall racks to join the others sitting in a tight group before the diner.

Bumblebee sat in the front and his team more or less behind him. Strongarm and Sideswipe weren't for once arguing but peeking over Bumblebee's shoulders at the strange sight before them, Grimlock took his seat behind them, and all three minicons were parked next to Bumblebee where they could see better. Jetstorm and Slipstream sat on their knees with their servos in their laps, Fix-It was taking down some sort of notes. Drift sat with his legs and arms crossed next to Bumblebee with a deeply concentrated expression on his faceplate.

They sat quietly like an audience, and the show was the two very big, very large mechs sitting several meters from them but very close to each other and Denny trying to make casual small talk with them.

The atmosphere was, simply put, awkward.

“Hey, hey guys, what did I miss?” Grimlock whispered when he sat back down.

Bumblebee filled him in with a voice that was worryingly blank, like he was an automaton spitting out product information: “Denny seems to have come to the conclusion that they are bonded.”

Strongarm and Sideswipe made a face at each other. Strongarm looked like she wanted to ask Bumblebee a ton of questions, but held her glossa since Bumblebee didn't seem to have grasped the situation himself yet.

Denny, on the other hand, was cheerful even if a bit awkward, but his awkwardness was on a more everyday level than the bots' so he had taken it upon himself to break the ice and act as the middleman between the generations. He wasn't very good at chatting with couples in a first place, hadn't been even when he had been married himself and it had only gotten worse during and after the divorce. An alien couple whose culture Denny had basically no clue about was the toughest case yet, but since not even Bumblebee who personally knew Optimus was up for the task Denny had put himself on the spot and did his best to act naturally.

Although despite the cultural difference and the whole alien thing the biggest issue was turning out to be that he just couldn't get over how intimidating the strange, gray mech looked with his hostile armor and red optics, even when he was gently holding Optimus' servos in his own.

But the newly reunited couple didn't look at anything but each other for long, even the air seemed to be brighter around them, and who was Denny to say red eyes were creepy from his Terran perspective anyway, so he did his best to relax and talk.

Plus if he was being completely honest with himself, it was great to have company that seemed to match his age group.

“So, you seem like you have been apart for some time, eh?” Denny said. He had driven one of his big vintage trucks next to them so he could sit on its hood and be a bit closer to their faces now that they were sitting down, but still came up only to their midsections.

Optimus smiled to him. “Oh, we have. We served in different units during the war and after... It's been such a long time.”

Megatron's shoulders jumped with something that seemed like a suppressed chuckle. “You could say a higher power brought us together.”

Optimus turned back to his partner and gave him a smile so soft it hurt to look at.

“And how long have you been together?” Denny asked then if only so he wouldn't have to look at that smile. His question made both mechs raise their optic ridges and glance at each other, and Denny could practically hear the younger bots behind him lean closer. “Or do your species keep count at all? I'd imagine after a few thousand years it would become pointless- “

Megatron raised his hand and Denny shut his mouth. The intimidating mech commanded authority like none Denny had seen before, aside from war movies.

“We do keep count,” Megatron answered. “But in our case the answer is... Complicated.”

Optimus' eyes flickered with amusement. “Indeed. We met two million, six hundred twenty-one thousand and nine-hundred ninety-three stellar cycles ago-”

“You counted?”

“Why, yes, I did.”

There was one of those smiles again. Megatron looked at Optimus from underneath his brow in a way to which Optimus replied with a smile and a look wearing an expression that made him look younger.

“Anyhow,” Optimus continued, reluctantly looking away from Megatron, “we were friends for a few thousand stellar cycles, then fought in a war for a few million more, and the last decade has been... Odd.”

“To say the least,” Megatron muttered under his breath.

Denny nodded along their story and tried to grasp the large numbers and put them in human perspective. His skills in math didn't compensate for his human perspective, and he only managed to understand that this couple had been apart for an extremely, terribly, stunningly long time, but what else there really was to say about that.

“Wow. You must be so happy to be together again,” Denny said.

“Yes, we are. *Finally*,” Megatron replied and put such a great stress on the final word that the time must have felt long even for them. Their hands were directly on Denny's eye-level and he watched them lace their fingers together.

“And everyone must be so happy *for* you!” Denny said and turned to the others sitting across from the old couple. *Or not*, he thought when he saw a row of narrowed eyes, raised brows and round mouths. Bumblebee looked the most dumbstruck of them all, and Denny wondered briefly about Russel and how he'd take to a stepmother. The thought bizarrely made him smile: Family matters were hard and complicated everywhere, even across the galaxy.

Russel didn't care much for a couple of old robots. He had more important things on his mind, and in his opinion everyone else should think about those too instead of the lovey-dovey old warriors. He walked up to Bumblebee and tapped on his knee. “So... Now that the Decepticons are captured

are you returning back to Cybertron?" he asked carefully.

Bumblebee shook himself awake from whatever trance he had sunken in and returned to his old self: "Ah... Well, most of the work is done. But Steeljaw managed to escape, and I wouldn't feel right leaving Earth with him at large. But the rest of you – "

"Permission to stay, sir!" Strongarm immediately piped up. "This is much more exciting than any other training!"

"Yeah, count me in!" Grimlock joined in.

"Me too!" Fix-It said, waving his servos.

"I believe Earth would be an ideal training ground for Jetstorm and Slipstream as well, if you would have us," Drift said.

Bumblebee smiled, and all optics turned to Sideswipe who awkwardly rubbed the back of his helm. "Well..." he started, "I suppose there are places to see and things to do here."

Russel lightened up and could barely stop himself from jumping up and down in happiness. He grinned up at them all so hard his cheeks hurt.

Bumblebee turned his optics to Optimus and, inevitably, Megatron. "Optimus... How about you? Are you leaving?"

Russel turned to the Prime and his partner, who exchanged looks.

Optimus turned back to Bumblebee, a tad bit tense and awkward while Megatron squeezed his servo in his hold tighter. "Well... Much has happened and changed in the recent past. You have grown and matured much, and have your own command now. You don't need me to guide you anymore. Then again..." he turned to look at Megatron, "I think we need some time before we can return to Cybertron and meet everyone. But Megatron doesn't like this planet."

It sounded like a question. Megatron opened his mouth but didn't answer right away, taking his time to consider his reply carefully. "Let's do what you want to do. Make your decision, I'll follow," Megatron slowly answered.

Optimus' optics widened and his face lit up with pure happiness. For a moment it looked like he was about to throw his arms around his partner and kiss him there, right in front of everyone, but controlled himself and looked away to break the growing tension.

"We'll stay on this planet as well," Megatron answered in Optimus' behalf.

Optimus gained a full control of himself and nodded. "Yes, but not here. You have your own command now, Bumblebee, and it won't do to have an old Prime and a gladiator soldier venting down your neck. Besides, we have much to talk about and we need privacy. We'll be just a commlink away."

Bumblebee looked like he wanted to protest, but as he looked at Optimus, Megatron, and their joined servos, then at his team who all looked at him with smiles and confidence he stayed quiet and nodded.

"Aw, you're leaving already?" Denny sighed up at the two older mechs.

"Well..." Optimus said. He and Megatron exchanged a look. "Tomorrow morning. Megatron needs

a new vehicle mode.”

Denny smiled and spread his arms. “Great! I've got some big cars around if you'd like to take a look? What kind of a car are you?”

Megatron smirked like a wolf with a mouth full of razors. “I am a fighter jet now, and I used to be a tank.”

Denny's excitement was brought down a notch. “Uh... I got no tanks lying around, sorry.”

Megatron continued to smirk and Optimus hummed a small laugh. “That's alright,” Optimus said. “We'll see about it tomorrow. As long as he gets wheels and won't look too hostile, we're going to be just fine.”

Megatron's razor smirk didn't seem to chill Optimus when it was directed at him, he only smiled back up at him, soft and affectionate. Megatron's gaze grew softer under that look even though his smirk was as cruel as ever.

“Yes, we will. And that is a promise.”

## Chapter End Notes

And then they drove into the sunset and lived happily ever after.

It's a wrap, my dear readers! This is how in my opinion the first season of Robots in disguise should have gone, and how events of Predacons Rising should have been fixed. Now a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. :)

Thank you for all your comments and kudos, plus for the likes and reblogs you gave me on Tumblr! Thank you for staying with this story until the end. It would make me very happy if you left a comment telling me what you thought of the story and/or clicked that kudos button if you liked this.

Now there's nothing more left to say, so I bow and leave the figurative stage~

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